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## When I am Laid in Earth: a novel, and critical commentary investigating 'Evocations of the Gothic: Creating "The Great Wrong Place" and Material Evidence in Contemporary Crime Fiction

### Thesis

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Nicola Harlow

***When I am Laid in Earth: a novel, and critical  
commentary investigating: Evocations of the Gothic:  
Creating “The Great Wrong Place’ and Material  
Evidence in Contemporary Crime Fiction.***

VOLUME I: A Novel

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PhD  
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2019

## **Abstract:**

The thesis is in two parts: Creative Writing (a novel) plus a Critical Commentary. The novel is an illustrated crime thriller with three male protagonists. In 2016, historical novelist, Cathy Adams is murdered at her isolated home; in 1851, twenty-five indentured mill girls disappear without trace. How these events are linked is revealed through the documents and images illustrating the text; the reader is encouraged to become detective. Set in an isolated West Yorkshire mill town, the story follows the lives of the three men in Cathy's life - her son, ex-husband and her father-in-law - as they seek their versions of the truth. This is a novel of palimpsests, about the rewriting of history and the evidence that the dead leave behind.

The critical commentary is split into the three main areas explored through the writing process: establishing the key lineage of Domestic Noir in relation to Sensation Fiction and the use of Gothic tropes in the modern cultural setting; the creation of landscape and domestic settings with their own narratives, and finally, the nature, revelation and interpretation of material evidence in crime fiction.

The original contribution to knowledge in the creative work lies in the clues presented in the narrative and the included digital images; these give the female victim agency and reveal otherwise unexplored aspects of the male characters' lives.

In the Commentary, original contribution is found in the critical and personal examination of the importance of landscape and the 'Great Wrong Place' to crime fiction; it also offers new insights into the relationships between evidence, narrative, image and text in the digital age.

*In memory of my daughter, Ursula*



**Acknowledgements**

With great thanks to Derek Neale, Sally O'Reilly and Linda Anderson for sharing their fount of knowledge so generously; for their eagle eyes, patience and good humour.

**Disclaimer**

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events, locales, and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental. All images included, with the exception of those referenced in the bibliography, have been created by the author.

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## Jake

Jake was jittery all day. He kidded himself it was because of his hangover, the alcohol and skunk still playing with his head. But he knew it was really because of the row.

Home from school, he slipped the key from under the mat by the back door as usual, opened up and went inside. Everything looked normal. The kitchen, with the blinds half open, rippled with a yellowish underwater light; his breakfast dishes were still on the side, the leftover cereal dried to cement. He helped himself to a can of his mum's cider from the fridge. It was just past four but already getting dark. Rain splattered on the flat roof of the conservatory. The only hint of something wrong was the annoying whine filling the house; a vinyl disc spinning uselessly on the retro player in the lounge. He pulled back the arm, but it shot forwards and the needle bumped back. A woman's voice, Dido's *Lament: When I am laid in earth, may my wrongs create no trouble in thy breast*.

He fell back onto the sofa and took a deep swig of cider. Lush, it was. Shutting his eyes, he allowed himself to think of Maddie Clark. She had the blackest eyes you ever saw and hair that looked like, he swilled the Strongbow round in the can, yeah, cider. The landline rang. He sprang up to answer, but the receiver wasn't in its cradle. He could hear it up in his mum's room and ran, taking the stairs in twos but it had stopped by the time he reached the top. He punched the bathroom door in annoyance. Sod this, he wasn't going to wait around. At least, after yesterday, his mum knew exactly how he felt. Another year and he'd be out of this valley, away from her and the messed up shit their lives had become.

He checked his mobile. Two messages. One he hadn't bothered opening from Mum sent this morning: *You know that I am here for you*; weird, as though nothing had happened. Another from Dino ten minutes ago: 'wtf are you?' His mates would be up at the skate park with the others by now, having a laugh and a smoke. He'd go up and join them but first he needed cash; a quick check for any loose coins lying around Mum's dressing table and bedside cabinet. If she'd been about, he could have asked her. Okay,

he would have had to grovel a bit first and she would've wanted to know what he'd done with the fiver she'd given him, and she might have demanded an apology for his behaviour yesterday at breakfast. But she wasn't around. She hadn't been there last night, either. Or this morning. And anyway, something was drawing him into her bedroom. Afterwards, when the police questioned him, he couldn't remember ever taking the decision to go in there.

She didn't look asleep. Her face was peaceful, relaxed even, resting on the palm of her hand. There was almost a smile on her lips. Her hair was arranged neatly, the grey and black fringe brushed down onto her forehead as though she was expecting visitors.

Mum! The cry would not leave his lips.

She was propped against pillows in some corny glamour pose, one leg over the other, one arm following the curve of her hip; naked except for a weird scarf thing she'd had forever. The scarf was made of woolly material, a mauve-blue colour, lying across the lower half of her body from the belly button down, fanning out across the blood-stained duvet. His fingers grazed the soft bobbles of the cloth and he remembered, in a horrible flash, her wearing this and tying it between them, him and her, Jakey and Mum, linked forever. Tenderly, he pulled the scarf aside, something he would never have dreamed of doing normally. It was stuck, and he had to force it away. He retched at what was exposed. The music drifted up:

*Remember me, remember me, but oh! Forget my fate.*

He didn't know what to do. He didn't and then he did; images from all the police series and detective dramas he'd watched with his mum over the years pressing him to act. But even as he told the operator, he knew it was pointless, too late. When the woman said they'd send someone 'right away', he told her there was no hurry. Then he phoned his dad who sighed and coughed and made out like he was too busy to be bothered with it all: 'What, now? But I'm in the middle of things.' The words tumbled from Jake's mouth, sounding mixed-up, wrong.

'Sh ... Sh ... Mum's b ... been. Dad, she's dead.'

And then he sat on the bed, texted Dino why he wouldn't be at the skatepark, and must have passed out or something because next thing he knew the house was full of blue flashing light and yellow tape. Police men and women outside talking on radios, sierra-oscar and all that stuff he knew from TV. Indoors, people wore paper overalls, masks over their mouths; they took notes and snapped photos. A woman was talking to him. Her name was Rachel; she was a detective and she had that kind of hair that looked plastic, brown and shiny, cut straight and level with her shoulders. He wanted to reach out and touch it, to see if it was real. He was led from the bedroom, where a fat man was taking measurements and tacking blue pieces of string to the wall. All the time Rachel explained what they were doing like he was some kind of special needs kid: 'We're looking for the direction of the splatters of blood on the wall, seeing where the guy who did it must have been standing.'

Jake looked back and saw another officer, a bald guy with sticking out ears, staring into his mum's face like he was about to kiss her or something. It was all he could do to stop himself gagging.

Downstairs, in the kitchen, Detective Rachel made him sit at the table, while she sat opposite, in Mum's place, asking him stuff; what time he came home from school, 'When did you last see your mother alive?' The word 'alive', did it. His mum had been alive yesterday, when he called her a rug-muncher, a dykey bitch.

'Jake, what in God's name is going on?' Dad had come. Jake knocked over a chair in his scramble to get to him.

'Ah, hello.' The detective was on her feet. 'You're Jake's father. The victim's husband. Please, take a seat?'

'Victim? What's this about Cathy?' Dad's eyes strayed past Rachel's shining hair and into the room beyond. *The lights are on but no one's at home*, Mum would say when he looked like that. Jake stood near, aware of his father's smell of old books, wanting to be taken into his arms, the bad dream soothed away. But Dad was not looking at him.

'Mr ... Adams, I am very sorry to tell you that your wife is dead -'



‘They’re separated.’ The words were out of Jake’s mouth before he’d even realised they were in his brain. Detective Rachel’s plasticky hair swung forwards in a nod, as though she knew, or was expecting such news.

Dad’s expression didn’t change, and Jake realised that he was staring at a photo on the wall in the lounge, a black and white of Rawton in the 1950s.

‘We’ll need your clothes, Jake,’ the detective said quietly. ‘You can wear paper overalls for now.’ She turned to his dad. ‘And you, Mr ... Adams? Yours, too, I’m afraid. Do you have a photo of the victim we can use? The sooner we get this in the public domain the better. Someone might have seen something, and the killer needs to know we’re looking.’ She was now standing between the kitchen and the lounge, her body blocking Dad from moving through. She was dressed all in black like a ninja or an undertaker. Radios fizzed with broken words. Alph-Tango D. . . Obediently, Jake, began to remove his jumper. He stared down at the kitchen lino, a teaspoon under the table, the blue handle of Mum’s mug where it had smashed. Detective Rachel was holding something up: the picture of Mum, the one from the cover of her book, her looking out, all shadowy and mysterious: Cathy Adams, famous author.

‘Do you have to use that one?’ his dad sounded like someone was trying to choke him.

The detective was snapping the picture with her phone. ‘Have you a better one, a photo you can locate quickly?’

‘Why, for Christ’s sake?’ his dad tried to get past her. He looked old, confused and his voice wavered like he wasn’t sure of his own questions. ‘Where’s Cathy?’ he said, sounding dumb and stupid. ‘Jake said, on the phone ... But she can’t be –’

‘Mr Adams, please take a seat at the table.’ She was firm but sympathetic. ‘It seems that your wife has been stabbed. We need to find who did this. Now, if you don’t mind ... Put on the overalls. We’ll go down to the station as soon as you’ve changed.’

Jake peeled off his clothes and stuffed them in the clear bag Detective Rachel left on the table. It was weird changing in the kitchen with the lights on, a woman nearby even though she turned her back. His Dad doing the same; his fingers shaking as he rolled down his trousers. The whine of the record player, the hiss of police radios, his Dad saying, ‘she can’t have left,’ over and over.

The sound of his whole life fucked.

In the back seat of Detective Rachel's car, Jake held onto his dad, hating the feel of the overalls, cold and clammy against his skin. His dad's hand was chill, dry as paper, hardly responding. He might have been crying. Wind buffeted the car. There were no words. A final glimmer of November light edged the clouds in the west. Jake stared out of the window. At dusk, all barriers between the garden and Rawton Moor disappeared. It was one of the things his mum loved about living here, high on the south facing side of the valley. It was like being at the top of a mountain, nothing but heather and turf, clouds and sky for neighbours.

Detective Rachel slammed the door and started the engine. She pulled off the brake and started the journey down into Rawton Bridge at the bottom of the valley. His town, shaped like a coffin, with a lid of sky.

## Ghosts of Scardale Valley

On 7<sup>th</sup> November 1976, nineteen year old Sally Hanes was on her way home from visiting the Reverend Arkwright of Flaights Chapel, through the woods, past the old mill site. She reported a strange glow emanating from the now derelict girls' house.

"It were as though there were a building there and I could see lights inside and people moving about. I were scared but I wanted to know what it were so I went closer and saw ten or more young lasses, all faded like, as though they were in a mist. They was dressed in long white frocks and all had long hair. But as I got nearer, they got more misty till I realised there were nowt there at all."

Miss Hannah Lumbardy of Market Street also remembers a strange experience recounted by her mother:

Evelyn Lumbardly, nee Greenhead, worked in Lye's Mill on the opposite side of the valley, but she used to walk through Flaights Woods when she and Hannah's father were courting in the late 1930s. One summer evening, the young couple stumbled upon a derelict mill. The walls were collapsing and many of the windows had been smashed. As they explored, they realised suddenly that they were no longer walking on a woodland path but upon cobbles; furthermore, that it seemed to be snowing – in July! They heard a claxton and a number of young women filed out of the mill. Again, they were reported to be faded and misty in appearance and attired in tattered Victorian garb. The girls were all thin and bowed. Evelyn told her daughter that they all looked as though they needed a good meal. They vanished once the couple drew closer.

With so many eyewitness accounts, from flashing lights to sightings, it would seem that the supernatural activity up at the abandoned Undercliffe Mill has been occurring for some time. If you go down to the woods to-day, be sure of a big surprise!



Undercliffe Mill 1976, looking upwards from Flaights Woods.  
Photograph by Thomas C. Smith

## Chris

The TV was on for the first time in months, blue light flickering over the ceiling, the sound down. The remains of the Chinese takeaway neither of them had been able to finish littered the floor, stinking out the flat with a sweet vinegary smell. Chris's head pounded. It had been an exhausting few hours of swabs and questions. And what questions. It was as though the police, or, more specifically, DI Rachel Stephens had cracked his skull open and peered inside, that everything in there was up for inspection. Thank God it was over now but her words kept coming back to him: Cathy dead. Cathy stabbed. Cathy dead.

So far, they'd watched a few minutes of a TV programme about rich old men marrying young women and some foreign news, but Jake, sitting in the solitary plastic chair, kept flicking irritatingly through the channels, unable to settle on anything. Chris looked at the door. It was hard to remember that Cathy wasn't going to waltz in to collect Jake, late from some book reading or conference, smelling of wine and outdoors and full of apologies about traffic and people staying beyond the finishing time.

'You can have the bed,' Chris said. He opened the cupboard where he kept the duvet and pillows. 'I'll sleep in the chair. It's okay. I don't mind. I'll be up early.'

Jake didn't respond. He was playing with his phone, prehensile thumbs punching messages. On the TV a woman in a war zone wept at the sight of her bombed-out house. Then Cathy's face flashed up. Murder. Pictures of Crimsworth Moor reminding everyone of other, older killings. The female newsreader was in the centre of Rawton Bridge.

'Cathy Adams, award winning author of *On Angels' Wings*, was found dead at her home earlier this evening. Police investigations are ongoing.'

'It's late, Jake, after two. We both need some sleep.' Chris flicked over the channel. His one duvet smelled pretty bad. He couldn't remember the last time he'd been to the launderette on the corner, but it didn't matter when there was just him. He threw the cushions off the sofa and released the mechanism to turn it into a bed. It took up most of the tiny flat. The sheet was stained with coffee, but he stretched it across and slung the duvet on top. 'There you go, son. Get your head down.'

Jake didn't move. Chris sighed, his gaze straying to the books on the mantelpiece. Now, more than ever, the pressure was on, the pressure to finish his research and publish. He bent down to his son, touched his arm. Jake reacted as though he'd been burned, pulling away and jumping up from the chair, before collapsing down again, his body shaking with sobs.

'Why did you turn the telly off?'

Chris crouched down, awkwardly. He patted Jake's shoulder wishing the lad was younger, not seventeen, almost a man he could no longer put on his knee and hold. He had been such a beautiful child. He remembered silky blonde curls, long eyelashes damp with tears. He remembered the softness and wholesome fragrance of him. He couldn't keep the creak of heartbreak from his voice 'You still need to rest, son.'

Jake thrust his phone into Chris's face. 'You can't shut it out. It's all over Insta, look. Already, just *minutes* after I found her, Dino it out there. Some mate. I should never have told him.'

Chris squinted at the tiny screen. Saw the headline: **Author Cathy Adams found dead at home**. He looked away. Next there'd be a book of condolences, a service in the local church, a wailing and gnashing of teeth, Cathy taken over, away from him to become a part of a collective past. His phone rang. Unthinking, he hit answer.

'Chris. I just heard what happened to Cathy.' It was Alex. She sounded drunk.

'How did you get my number?'

'They said she was murdered.'

'Looks that way.' He stared at Jake who was frantically texting. For a moment, their eyes met. He looked away quickly.

'I warned her about you,' Alex slurred. 'I knew something was going to happen. She told me how weird —'

Chris switched his phone off and shoved it in his pocket. The police had already copied the contents of his sim, so it was worthless to the investigation.

'Who told them, Dad? Who *knew*?' Jake's words rose near to a scream. He then pushed his face into Chris's chest, burrowed into his shirt as though he was four years old again, told off by Cathy for spilling his drink and wanting the hurt to go away. Chris

froze. It was so long since anyone had touched him. He had almost forgotten. His son smelled of school, disinfectant and sweat and pencil-sharpenings, a faint hint of cigarette. It was a familiar, almost pleasant aroma. Tentatively, he put his arms around him, but his shoulders felt stiff and out of practice and he couldn't hold the position. He eased himself away, wanting to escape to the library and the comfort of his books.

'I don't know, son.' He rolled his shoulders to ease some of the tension. 'Maybe the police? That DI, she said she wanted it out in public.'

Jake jabbed at the phone with his finger. 'There's already flowers. Outside our house, piling up like it's a grave ... Did the detective want that as well?' The tears on his cheeks gleamed like jewels in the smartphone's backlight. 'Look, some sick fuck's taken a photo.' On the screen, a flashlit scene: four bunches of supermarket flowers against the gate, darkness beyond. A handwritten poster, 'Cathy Adams, an angel at peace', alongside the image of her on the front of the original book: his wife looking out at the viewer, that weird mix of depression, aloofness and seduction in her eyes. 'Dad?'

'What is it?'

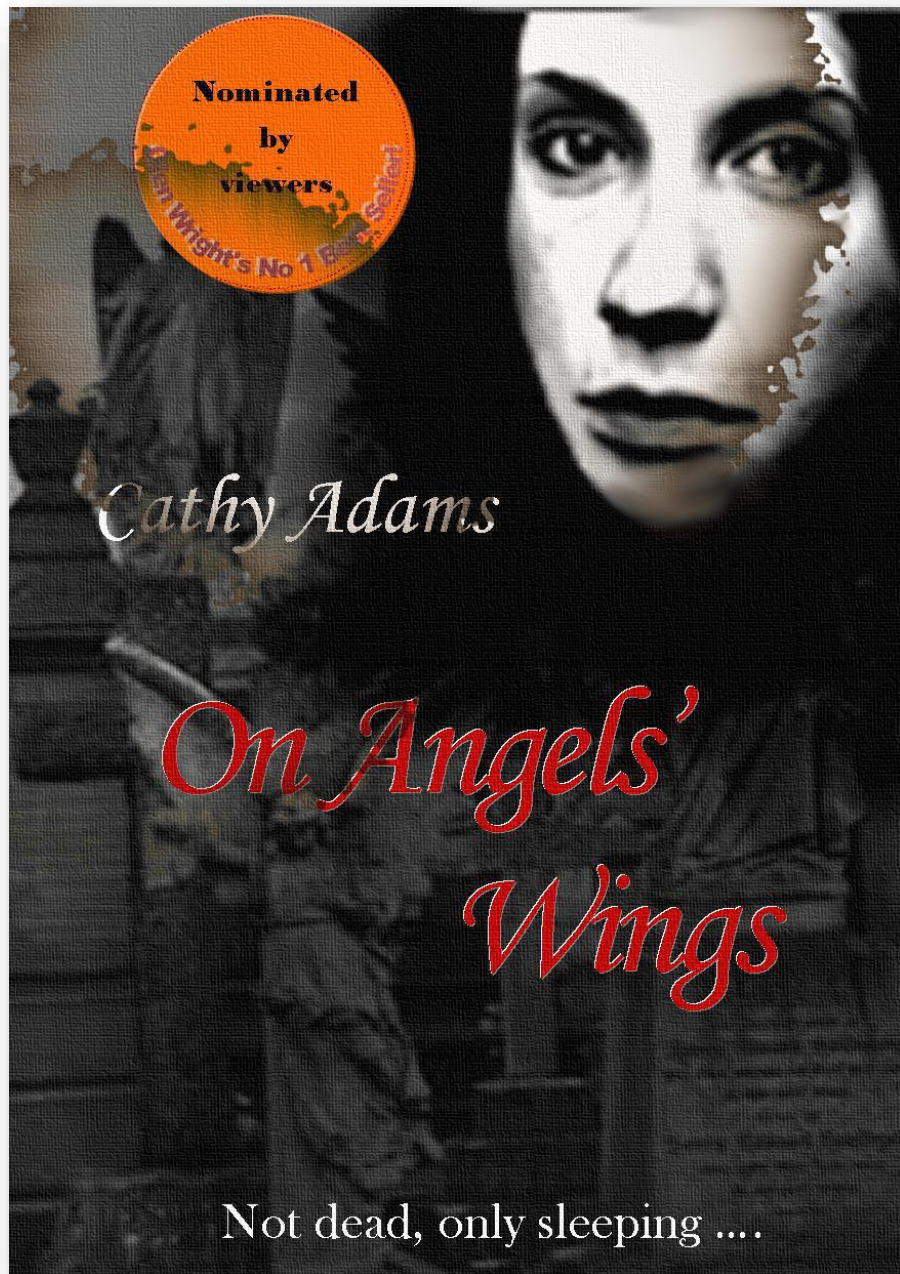
'I think Mum knew ... Knew something was going to happen. She kept talking about leaving Rawton. Dad, she hated it here. Said it was like a grave. And she was right.'

'Get some rest, Jake.' Chris tore his gaze away from the screen and stood up. 'Tomorrow, maybe we'll go over to Bony's, see about a bed for you there.'

Jake didn't sleep till around four. Chris, curled up in the chair with his old sheepskin coat to keep him warm, could see the light from the phone flashing in the dark. He kept his mind carefully focused. There was serious work to do now. Cathy's death had made it all the more urgent. A final push and Elijah Thomas would be nailed. He couldn't allow anything to detract from that. The truth would be unearthed.

He drifted off for an hour or two but woke at six with a stiff neck and the sound of the milkman roaring around town on his quadbike. Uncoiling his limbs, he stretched, wincing at the aches grating through muscles and joints. At forty-seven he was too old to be sleeping in a chair. He stood up, went to the window and peered out at the grimy dawn. His flat was a two-room bedsitter on the second floor of a thin Victorian building with

dry rot in the roof and drug dealers downstairs. A one-time pub, it was sandwiched between a quilting shop and an organic wholefood store on the main road running along Scardale valley bottom between Blackstone and Gibbetroyd. It was the worst flat he could find at the time on the only road into the town. A constant rumble of traffic shuddered through the building from dawn to dusk. It was starting up now, commuter traffic bound for the big cities to the east and west. He looked down at the pavement, slick with rain, at the old Co-operative store opposite; it was now a community centre, donated to the good citizens of the town by the council. He looked out onto the sliver of a town, tucked down into the valley between two counties, a town built on the white slave trade of the industrial revolution, and experienced a yearning he could not articulate. Sometimes, he believed that he could blink, and it would all disappear, the shops and the roads and the old mills, that the town would revert to its natural state of rock and water, moor and wind. A shadow passed his window, an owl swooping its way home. The world was waking. Footsteps echoed on the street below; an early blackbird scratched a solo. The first dawn without Cathy.





## Bony

Bony woke in his studio to the sound of the rain pelting on the glass roof and someone calling his name. He stretched and unstuck his best hog-hair paintbrush from his right sleeve. Not too much damage, the sleeve had kept the Prussian-blue oil paint and the bristles tapered to a moist teardrop. He put the brush behind his ear and relit the joint that had been his nightcap a few hours earlier.

‘Bony!’ There it was again, over the hammering rain. ‘Bony!’ He rose with some difficulty and tottered over to the window. The garden was dark and dripping, the valley rising beyond like the shoulder of a monolith.

‘Bony, please, open up and let us in!’ Something disturbed the rhododendrons, a flash of cerulean and black, then a hooded silhouette, a monk stepping from one of Casper David Friedrich’s Gothic abbeys. This *sensi* was good stuff. Bony backed away from the window. The joint burned low, singeing his fingers. From the backdrop of dripping green, his son’s pale face emerged, breath steaming on the glass. ‘Bony?’

‘Chrissie!’ His middle-aged son carried with him a *grisaille* world of indistinguishable greys that made him want to roll another joint and get out of his tree. He took a last exasperated drag, threw down the roach and opened one of the glass double doors – once the grand entrance to the Edwardian orangery this room had been. Chris stomped past him heaving an overfull bin bag straight into the studio. He was followed by young Jake, a guitar case slung across his back. Both men pulled off their sodden cagoules and hung them on Bony’s old hat stand.

‘Bit early for you two, isn’t it?’ Bony spluttered, the smoke catching in his chest.

‘It’s eight o’clock.’ Chris’s dull gaze wandered across the room; no doubt he was on the cadge as usual. ‘Normally, I’d have been working for a couple of hours by now.’

‘*Normally?*’ Bony stared beyond Chris, out of the door, though there was not much to see today. Coldwater House, his home and studio for nearly fifty years, was dominated by the dark mass of Craggside, a jagged formation of millstone grit that towered over the town. The rain now hammering down did nothing to alleviate the sombre palette of the

morning. Above the garden, all was smeared and misty, fuzzy and indistinct. You never know what is coming over the hill, was a common saying in the area. This time, nothing could have prepared him.

‘Cathy was *killed* yesterday.’ Chris said this as though he was supposed to know, as though all he needed was a gentle reminder. For a moment, time, like the smudged tones of Cragside, slowed to a blur. And then Jake gave a little yelping sound, and the clock was ticking again.

‘Cathy, *what?*’ Bony stared at his son, but Chris averted his eyes, nervously pushed his hair away from his face. His voice was loud in the silence of the studio.

‘Jake needs somewhere to stay so he’s going to stop with you a while. It’s too small at my place. You’ve got room. I’ve only one bed and I’ve got my research to do. With all this going on, I can hardly think.’

‘Hey, slow down!’ Bony wished he’d rolled another joint, a larger one. ‘Chrissie, what are you saying, man? *Cathy* ...?’

‘Yeah.’ Chris flung himself down on the old chaise longue. ‘She’s been stabbed. Dead. And Jake’s a mess. He needs some help. I can’t cope with it.’

‘Jeez!’ Bony shook his head, grateful for the slightly woozy feeling the joint had given him. He tapped his dope tin. ‘You’re saying Cathy’s dead ... Murdered? You’re not ... Serious? Jeez, Chrissie, tell me you’re not saying what I think –’ The floor lurched up towards him as he tried to process. Cathy. Please, not Cathy ... ‘No wonder the kid’s strung out ...’

‘I am here. You don’t need to talk about me like I’ve got learning difficulties,’ Jake said. He was leaning against the hat stand as though he wouldn’t be able to keep upright by himself. It was obvious the boy was devastated; his whole body looked bowed and disjointed. Bony went to him and pulled him into a bear hug. The information just wouldn’t go in. Cathy dead. Cathy murdered. The kid must be feeling like hell. Cathy of all people was the last person anyone would want to kill. She was so ...definite. Jake’s hair was wet, the skin on his cheek cold. The kid didn’t want holding. He was pulling away, looking at his mobile phone, his face tinted by the blue light.

Bony tried to think, but nothing made sense. ‘Oh, man, I don’t know what to say ... Who would do such a thing?’

‘Grampa, no one knows. The police are looking. Might be a fan. Might be anyone ... Loads of people knew Mum, or thought they did.’ Jake held up his phone. ‘There are so many weirdoes out there. Look here!’ He held out the screen and read, “‘Cathy Adams, my Donatella. An angel taken too soon. ”, “Cathy, laid in earth, rest in peace”. Sickos, all of them. Look!’ He shoved the phone into Bony’s hand, but he could barely make out the screen without his glasses. He nodded and handed it back.

‘So, the police know about all these messages?’

But Jake had broken down now. Huge sobs rasped their way through his body, and he doubled, folding in on himself like a collapsing star.

‘Oh, Kid,’ Bony blinked tears from his own eyes. This was all too weird. Too familiar. It seemed seconds ago that he had tried to comfort Chris when Sylvie, his mother, had gone. ‘I’m sure the police will soon catch them.’

‘They can’t bring her back, though, can they? They can’t unstab her?’ Jake screamed. He ran into the little toilet off the studio and slammed the door.

Chris sat up on the chaise longue, his fingers digging into his temples as though he wanted to scoop out his own brain. ‘I need a break,’ he said, his voice almost a squeal. ‘Cathy’s fans and readers are all out there, putting flowers and stuff round the house. They all want to know who she knew: who she went out with. It’s too much. And we all know the person they *should* be talking to!’

Bony reached for the tin of sensi and his cigarette papers on his table and went to his seat by the window to skin up. He needed something to steady his nerves. Chris was still ranting on.

‘I ... I’m *trying* to work on my book. Just yesterday, I found something – some new evidence, about who the girls were – a court document on Elijah Thomas buying a batch of apprentices in 1841. A legal and binding document. I’ve never been this close.’

Bony prised the tin open, lifted it to his nose and breathed in the oily, citrusy aroma, trying to ignore the sharp spike of irritation his son always provoked in him. ‘Chrissie, you’ve been crazy about those damned mill girls since you were a kid. But you really

think now's the time? Cathy's dead. Your wife is dead! Your son's heartbroken. You've got her fans and the pigs on your back and you want to go and write a book on some kids that died a hundred and fifty years ago?'

Chris stood up and lurched towards him. 'So, what do I do, eh? Sit around crying, smoking dope and feeling sorry for myself? Cathy, she *told me* to finish my book. She told me I had to work, that's what she said. She said I was *unfulfilled*, that I needed to *concentrate*. She told me to get that flat, so I could finally finish the book I was born to write.'

Bony closed his eyes. Poor Chrissie. He'd never been strong like other people. How Cathy had put up with it for so long was anyone's guess. He shivered, a sudden recollection leaving him numb. If, after what he'd done to her, Chris believed she asked him to leave because she wanted him to write a book, then he was deluded as well as weak. Chris had failed as an academic, as a husband; he was in danger of checking out on fatherhood, too.

'Anyway, I thought ... You can look after Jake, here.'

Bony blocked out the whine of his son's voice and rolled a line of pungent sensi into a five-skin joint. He brought it to his lips and flicked his zippo.

'I can get on fine by myself.' Jake flung open the door of the toilet and Bony watched the wracked figure of his grandson making his way across the studio. Despite the hair that was as flame red as his own had been, back in the day, he was insubstantial, as though his skeleton was failing beneath the flesh. Poor kid. He must be, what, sixteen, seventeen, though right now he could be about seven. He was a blur of umber, his face pale cream, with smudges of burnt sienna under his eyes. Maybe he should paint him. 'Sure, you can, Jake, but you'll need somewhere to crash.'

'Bony! Please stop smoking that shit and listen to me!' Chris hurled the bin bag onto the floor, where it burst open, spewing its contents, jeans and underwear, over the paint splattered floorboards. He bent and began to pick them up, stuffing them under his arm as though they were live animals. 'Here are Jake's clothes. He'll be a lot better off with you.'

‘Dad?’ Jake was staring up at Chrissie, those big bruised eyes full of need. Bony took a deep toke, allowing Chrissie’s words to dissipate into the atmosphere like angry bees. No wonder Cath blew him out. Couldn’t he see what he was doing to Jake? What had happened to Chrissie to make him so ... So weird? Maybe it was losing his mum so early. Maybe he was just a loser.

‘You want to give it a go, Jake?’ Bony asked.

The kid shrugged and fumbled at a packet of cigarettes, a cheap brand that Bony could never stand. Head down, he was immersed in the flashing screen of his phone again. Chris thrust the clothes at him, waved his hand hopelessly and blundered out into the rain.



**Burnside University**

20th August 1991

Name	Title of project	Grade
Christopher Adams	Roses and Thorns	79
<b>Examiner's Comments</b>		
Mr Adams conducts a thorough investigation into the subject of industrial relations between west Yorkshire millowners and their employees in the first decades of the nineteenth century. His writing is fluent and he offers insights into the way the social order of the period was shaken up by the introduction of a free market economy. This detailed study of local history sources uncovers some unique practices among the entrepreneurs of the Scardale Valley. Of particular note is the way in which paternalistic attitudes survived in this area well into the 1830s and beyond due to the slow take-up of mechanisation. The philanthropic deeds of millowners such as Elijah Thomas are well documented here, as are the strictures put upon workers. Christopher concludes that he is only scratching the surface of this subject and that there is a lot more to uncover.		

## Chris

‘I understand why you called in, Mr Adams – after the shock of yesterday, but there’s nothing yet to report, it’s early days. We’ll be in touch as soon as we hear anything.’ DI Rachel Stephens smiled. He wondered if she was always this immaculately turned out, whether she’d ever spent the night on a chair. ‘We will continue with our enquiries and, of course, inform you as soon as we find out anything at all ... How’s Jake?’ She motioned for him to sit down at the other side of the table.

Chris shrugged but sat obediently. His jacket was soaking. The rain had come down heavily during the short walk from Bony’s to town. He didn’t want to take it off though, not here. He stared up at the high, barred Victorian window. He didn’t want to talk about Jake or Cathy. He wanted to ask her about bodies. Why hadn’t he thought of it before? A policewoman was an obvious person to ask. Bodies were her stock in trade. How long would it take a corpse to completely decompose in this kind of a landscape, in the boggy bits of the woodland, or sunk in peat on the moor. After, say, one hundred and fifty years, would there be anything left?

She cleared her throat in an obvious way, like someone about to make a prepared speech. Her eyes were lined with black. Maybe she fancied herself as Cleopatra or Hatshepsut. There were daguerreotypes in the library of local women posing for the camera in Egyptian garb; the wives and daughters of the good burghers of Rawton Bridge, taking time out in 1890s from the strictures of non-conformism and corsetry.

‘There is a counselling service, Mr Adams.’ She leaned across the desk as she said this. He could smell her perfume, something flowery and light. The movement made her white blouse gape a little and he could just make out the soft outline of her breast inside the silky material. He looked away. ‘Perhaps you would like to see one of our counsellors yourself...?’ He winced inwardly. He’d seen so many counsellors over the years. After a silence, during which she waited, expecting something from him, some admission

maybe, an unburdening, she looked up at the clock on the wall. 'More pressingly, we need to think about how we are going to handle the media. With Mrs Adams being a popular author, it's inevitable that there is already speculation.'

He stared at her hand. The nail polish was immaculate, pearly pinky brown, the same colour as her lips. Automatically, he curled his hands into fists beneath the table.

'I'll cut to the chase. You two were separated.'

He nodded.

'And you were married for ... how long?'

Unable to resist, he put his thumb in his mouth, bit off a ragged length of skin. 'Twenty years last May – but we went through all this last night. Is this a formal interview or what?'

'Oh no, no, Mr Adams. After all, you came in to see me; I'm just checking a few of the details we went through last night. You were married a long time. Longer than most.'

The breath caught in his throat. It was still, after all this time, a shock to admit the failure of their marriage. 'It was a temporary arrangement. Me and Cathy, we ... When I've finished my work, I'll be moving back in.'

She coughed and took her hand away as though his gaze was somehow sully. 'That's not going to be happening now.'

'No.' His heart was racing. He looked beyond her to the ornate skirting boards, the elegant architrave around the door. The building had been purpose-built in 1861 with money donated by the town council. Elijah Thomas had been on the board of trustees.

'You must have lived apart a while now.'

He shrugged. He hadn't come here for this. He had research of his own to do. 'Does it matter?'

'Not really.' She gave brisk smile. 'But these things are helpful to know.'

He sighed. 'June. I moved out in June. Five months ago.'

'You weren't getting on too well?'

He couldn't look at her. That mantle of black hair was like an inquisitor's helmet. Instead he stared up to the ceiling where the old gas fitting remained, superseded now by



a fluorescent strip. 'I'm working on a book. Once it's with the publishers, then the plan is, I move back in.'

'Your plan?' The DI's stare was unnerving.

'I can't recall. Cathy's. Mine. We agreed.' He swallowed. When was it his turn to ask the questions?

She picked up a pen from the desk, held it between her thumb and forefinger for a moment, then replaced it. 'Mr Adams, where were you Tuesday afternoon?'

'What. Why?' He looked up, found himself locking eyes with her. She didn't flinch. 'W ... Why?'

'Mrs Adams had been dead for some time before your son called us. We will have to check all your movements leading up to her death, so we can eliminate you from our enquiries. The more information we have, the sooner we find out what happened.'

'How long?'

'The results from the autopsy won't be through for a day or two. We'll let you know if there's anything more. And of course, the forensics team are still at the house ... Mr Adams, is something the matter?'

He hadn't realised he was doing it, that old childhood habit of lining things up: the top of her head with the water cooler behind, the side of the water cooler with the edge of the doorframe and the poster about not abusing staff with the top of the water cooler. He could only do it when he squinted his eyes a certain way. 'No?'

'So, on Tuesday, you were ...?'

He forced himself to focus on her face. It was all planes, narrow and inquisitive. Her glamour had vanished. He didn't want to tell her where he was. He didn't want to tell her anything, but he knew she wouldn't let up.

'I ... I was at home. Writing. Working. Then I went out, up to Undercliffe Mill to look for –'

'And can anyone vouch for you?'

He shook his head, miserably. No one had seen him up there. The weather had been too bad for walks in the woods. 'I work alone. I just want to know –'

‘Mrs Adams was only found yesterday afternoon,’ she said, her voice softening. She glanced at the window, against which the rain was hammering. ‘I understand you want to find out who did this to your wife – ex-wife, forgive me – but we have a process, many processes that take time. There’ll doubtless be other questions to ask you in good time, but not before we have a more accurate picture of what happened.’ She rose then, offered her pearly-clean manicured hand. He nodded gruffly and remained where he was.

‘The thing is,’ he began, looking up at her. ‘You can date bones, can’t you? Tell how long someone has been buried. And how old they were when they died ...?’ He cursed his incoherence as he saw her look of horror quickly masked by a grim professional curiosity. ‘I’m not talking about Cathy here. I mean other, older bones. I mean, if I were to find any.’

Her fingers clutched the back of her chair and he wondered if she was going to faint. Surely not, a police woman like her, a professional. She’d be used to bones and the like. She quickly recovered and with a brusque movement, brushed her fringe away from her face and took her seat again. Now she adopted a surprisingly friendly tone. ‘And have you found any bones, Mr Adams?’

Too late he realised his mistake. Coming here, to the police station asking about bones ... And now she’d probably decided he was the worst kind of serial killer, stashing bodies around the place. But where do you ask about stuff like that? He’d tried the internet, but it was all too confusing and vague. It was a simple enough question: how long before bones disappear. ‘Sorry, he muttered, standing up. I ... I shouldn’t have come. I’m a historian, you see. I’m working on what you might call a cold case –’

‘Mr Adams, if you know about any bones, human bones, if you’ve found any, then this is a matter for the police.’ Her voice was icy.

‘No.’ Now he was blushing like a kid. How could he have been so stupid turning up here when, for all the syrupy assurances, last night he’d been treated as a suspect. Brought down in a police car, left sitting for hours in sweaty paper overalls getting a rash on his backside while they took swabs and prints and asked him questions about Cathy. ‘It’s okay. I ... I shouldn’t have come. It was a stab in the dar –’ Even his excuse involved a sharp object. Now she was glaring at him as though he was a mass murderer. Sweat

broke out on his upper lip. How to undo this, how to rerun the last twenty minutes so that he just walked right past the Rawton Police station incident room, and straight home.

He held out his hand, conscious of the shake. Six weeks and not a single Marlboro. He could do with one now. 'I'm sorry to have bothered you ... And don't worry. About what I just said. It's history, like I say.'

She did not accept his hand but held onto the back of her chair, taking a deep and steady breath. 'We'll be holding a press conference at eleven. It would help to have someone from the family appeal for any witnesses on behalf of the family. Would you be willing, Mr Adams?'

'No. God, no.' He'd seen those people on the television, mourning relatives, red faced and teary, telling the world how much the victim had loved life, how they hadn't deserved to die so cruelly, only for the media to start accusing *them*.

She was very pale, her olive skin looked sallow, almost yellow, but it could have been the strip lighting. 'That's okay. I'm not sure why you came here today, but don't leave Rawton Bridge, Mr Adams.'

'I wasn't planning on going anywhere,' he said, shoving his arms into his already damp raincoat. 'Too much work to do.'

Hope someone comes forward. In the meantime, if you hear anything or find any *bones*, be sure to let me know.' She remained, motionless. Her eyes, cold and speculative, did not leave his face until he turned to go.


Plate 4

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# BC

## Beyond Crying Bereavement Care

*"We're here when a loved one dies"*



**R4 Today Programme. Transcript of interview with author Cathy Adams 17<sup>th</sup> February 2012**

**Angie Frank:** *On Angel's Wings* is as much about grief as it is about crime or horror.

**Cathy Adams:** I suppose it is; grief, you see, was so much a part of my own young life.

**Angie Frank:** Donatella leaves everything familiar. Her father in Turin has died, then the only friend she has in England is murdered. She is alone and at the mercy of Elias Raptor, her husband. Is there an element of autobiography here? After all, your parents both died in quick succession?

**Cathy Adams:** I suppose I did tap into that raw grief when Mum and then Dad ... It was a very difficult time for me. And also, later, moving to Rawton Bridge was hard. It's very different from Leeds.

**Angie Frank:** So Donatella's isolation was a mirror of your own?

**Cathy Adams:** Look, all writers tap into their own experiences to give their work authenticity. At the time of writing, I guess, I did feel alone ...

**Angie Frank:** We also have Senga Horton in the studio with us, today, director of BC, the bereavement charity, so just before we finish, Cathy, could you give any advice to those suffering a recent death?

**Cathy Adams:** Well, you're putting me on the spot, here ... I suppose my main advice would be to avoid rushing into any new relationships when you are grieving. You are vulnerable and sad. Donatella accepts her husband's behaviour because she is still missing her father. She agrees to marry him and even turns a blind eye to murder because she is mourning her life back home in Turin. She's a mess, in other words, which is what most of us are when someone close dies. And don't move away from your familiar surroundings. Once you are isolated, you are open to all sorts of abuse.

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## **Bony**

He tried to orientate himself. Time had slipped, a rush of past and present pooled around him, the level rising, threatening his lungs. Cathy's remembered face, her shining face, blended into Sylvie's, floating towards him out of the dark. He sat on his old piano stool, sucking every vestige of life from a joint and watched the slow turning of the light, colours deepening as the morning progressed. The rain hammered on the glass roof of the conservatory. Jake lay front down on the old settee, buds in his ears, the constant flash of the phone illuminating his features with Byzantine light. They waited but for what, he didn't know.

After a silence that stretched out the day, Bony was moved to speak. It was almost noon and his growling stomach was reminding him that he needed to eat. 'You want some food?' he asked, entranced by the cut-outs of light playing on the wall behind Jake's head. His house and studio were on the north facing side of the valley; between November and March, he lived in a four-month gloaming, lending his palette its cold tones, blues and purples and brown. 'Might wake us up. Make us feel better...'

Jake stared at him blankly. Only a day and his face was hollowed out with loss. 'Do you think I'll ever feel better?'

Bony chewed on the unlit roll up at the corner of his mouth. Maybe, if they got Cathy's killer banged to rights, there would be a chance. But that would depend on who the killer turned out to be. He tried to quell the low dread building. For years he'd known it, ever since that day Cathy had posed on his chaise longue, her skin a honeyed cream tinged pink by a June sunset. Fate, karma, call it what he may, was deciding her verdict. He knew it wouldn't be good. 'Sure, you will.' He stood up, his knees creaking, and brushed down the khaki shorts he wore throughout the year. 'You never forget ... But things get easier. Your dad got over it, when his mum ... When Sylvie left.' It was a lie, the kind of lie that wouldn't make a damn of difference but he felt compelled to say it

anyway, to comfort himself as much as the kid. Was the kid even listening? He was staring down at that phone of his; punching in letters as though the very action could wreak some vengeance.

Bony swallowed an acrid trickle of tobacco, tried again. ‘Man, it was a real head trip at first. Chris and me, left on our own like that. I ... couldn’t reach him.’

Jake didn’t look up. He jabbed at the screen, his hand curled over into an almost fist. Bony narrowed his eyes, struck by the way his knuckles had become splashes of Naples yellow and titanium white against the soft umber tones of his hand. This was where a woman would work her magic. She would take that clenched fist in her own and open it. She would soften him, ease his wretchedness. Bony felt a sudden lurch of grief for Cathy, for Sylvie, for Chrissie and Jake. He couldn’t let the same thing happen again. He had to help Jake before he, like Chris, was lost.

‘We’d bought Chrissie a bike, his first proper two-wheeler just before Sylvie ...’ His voice constricted at the memory, but he went on. ‘And she made him promise to learn to ride it that summer. She knew she wouldn’t be around much longer, must have been planning it ... And Chrissie, he held onto that, in those months afterwards. It was the only thing that kept him going, riding that little bike up and down out there till I joked he was wearing a rut in the path ... But the stabilisers never came off. He never quite managed to balance by himself ...’ He stared out into the garden. The narrow herringbone path was choked with weeds now, hardly visible in the fast fading light.

Jake looked up, his eyes like pebbles. ‘Grampa, where will I be sleeping?’

‘Sleeping?’

‘Yes ... Which room?’ With his over-large puppy hands clenched and his shoulders tense, he looked ready to hit someone.

‘Oh, I don’t know. We’ll decide later. It’ll be ...’ Bony waved his hand vaguely in the direction of the door into the hall. ‘One of them.’ It was a big house with five rooms upstairs and an attic crammed with four decades of artistic endeavour.

‘Is there a room ... I mean without all your, like, crap everywhere?’

‘Crap?’ Bony grinned, feeling guilty for doing so, under the circumstances. ‘You’re talking about my life’s work, man. My ...’

‘Whatever.’ Jake slumped back down into the sofa and one of the old rugs that’d been thrown over to hide the cigarette burns and other stains, peeled back to reveal a rug from an earlier era. In its time, it had been a beautiful ultramarine colour; now it was brownish, stained and grubby like everything else in the room. He shuffled on his sandaled feet. The boy unsettled him. He looked around, seeing his room, his life, as Jake must see it, lacking in any kind of modernity; himself outdated and old.

Jake opened his hand, then clenched it again. ‘Sorry, Grampa, I didn’t mean to be rude.’

Bony touched the Naples yellow knuckles. It was vital that the boy stay with him, down here. ‘Come on, man. You can’t let the bastards grind you ...’ He cast about the room for inspiration. ‘I see you’ve brought a guitar. I used to play, you know – years ago. Still got the old hummingbird.’

‘Seriously? You’ve got a Gibson?’

‘Somewhere ... Up there among all my other gear. Someone gave it to me at a party in New York in return for a painting, back in the day.’

‘Yeah, whatever.’ Jake pulled his hand away and rose; the phone slipped from his grasp. Bony caught it before it hit the floor.

‘I’d turn this piece of junk off,’ he said, fitting it squarely into his palm. ‘There’s no point in making yourself more –’

‘Give it me!’

‘Here, you are, kid.’ He was about to hand it over when a new message pinged up making a noise, like a music box underwater. He squinted, trying to get the text on the screen in focus.

Jake lunged forward, hair flopping into face. ‘Please, give it me!’

Bony hesitated and looked down at the phone. Jake jumped up, his face red with the effort.

‘Grandpa, I’m not joking. Come on.’

Bony held the phone between thumb and forefinger, his precious painting hand. Jake made a futile grab. Bony turned his back and stared at the screen. One message: *If you need to talk, call me. Any time. Maddie.*

‘Who is she?’ Bony held it out but Jake was crumpling, boneless, flailing for the phone as though it was the only thing in the whole universe that could save him. Bony caught his grandson, wishing he could do something, but this was all new to him, both new and weirdly familiar. Unbidden, his wife, Sylvie, came again into his mind. Sylvie at their wedding dressed like a medieval princess, her dark hair frothing around her face. She was too good for him, at least that was what his friend, Humph, had always said: ‘She’s out of your league, old chum.’ But then, Humph had fancied his chances with her himself.

For weeks after she left, Chrissie had peddled down to the police station and pestered the duty officer. When no one would see him, he rode round and round outside. With trembling fingers, Bony scrabbled for his matches. No point in remembering, not today. But Chrissie, eight-year-old Chrissie with his tumbling curls, the delicate tracery of blue veins on his temples, refused to peddle away.

Bony groped for words, any words to disperse the grief he could feel in Jake’s body, but nothing came, only a need to do something practical. ‘Okay. Let’s find you somewhere to crash,’ he managed at last, slipping out of the comfortless embrace.

‘It’s okay Grampa. I’m going to school. We can sort it later.’ The kid stood, pushing his hair back, rubbing at his eyes.

‘Kid, it’s not a clever idea. School, today ...?’

But Jake was already retrieving his damp jacket and slinging it on, wiping his eyes, preparing himself for the outside world. Bony wanted to stop him, knew that he should, but he couldn’t find the strength to speak.

‘I’ll be back later, Grampa.

‘You really sure about this, kid?’

But the boy had already slipped out of the studio door and into the sodden garden.





## Jake

Thank fuck it was double Tech straight off after lunch. Everyone was too busy hammering and sawing to notice Jake come in to the workshop. Mr Robertson— Sir - gave a curt nod in his direction, but he was seeing to Tombo who was kicking off as per usual. Dino and The Major obviously clocked him as he'd had to walk right past their table, but neither even looked up. Jake located his own work on the shelves lining the room: the half-finished cabinet he'd been making for his mother. It was still there, looking shitter than ever. Only the outer shell was any good. He'd painted a trompe l'oeil design of wisteria around it, which made it kind of special. The shelf he'd put up inside had slipped down about forty mils and someone had unscrewed the knobs from the doors. Very nice. He glared at his classmates. No doubt they hadn't expected him back in this term.

‘Adams, a word.’ Robbo jerked his thumb in the direction of the storeroom. He'd somehow managed to calm Tombo down and he was happily screwing two pieces of wood together. Everyone looked now his name was called out. He saw Maddie's beautiful cider-coloured head rear up. For a moment, her eyes held his own.

Robbo shoved him into the workroom. ‘What are you doing here?’ he demanded in a low voice. ‘I ... I heard what happened, but today of all days.’ He bent down, almost whispering. ‘You should be at home with your family.’

Jake shrugged. Everything was doing his nut in. His dad whining on about missing girls, old Gramps Bony going on about ‘the days back when, man’, his mobile going crazy with messages from totally random people. On Snapchat and Twitter and Instagram the photos of his mum were multiplying along with the quotes from her book. Some pretty famous people had left condolences, too; that actor from *The Met* on TV had written that she was one of ‘England's undiscovered treasures’, and some old feminist woman posted that ‘all young women should read Cathy Adams’. But what did any of it mean when she was lying in some morgue waiting to get chopped up? It was enough to make anyone want to come to school. He clenched his fists.

And then there was Alex Wadsworth.

Robbo ran his finger along the edge of a shelf of hand planes. Curls of wood pattered to the floor. Jake liked the smell of the new wood. It was comforting, somehow, reassuring. Shame Robbo stank of sweat.

‘Go home, Adams,’ the teacher said. ‘It’s too soon, lad. You need to take some time to grieve. Your family need you.’

‘Sir, I want to stay here.’ Now he had said it, a rush of relief that brought tears to Jake’s eyes. ‘I’d rather make my cupboard and ...’

Robbo put his hands on Jake’s shoulders. He could smell his foul teacher-breath. ‘Okay,’ he said more quietly. ‘I know. It’s kind of easier to make a cupboard than to face reality.’

‘Reality?’ Jake said quickly. ‘I’ve already faced it.’ Now his breath came as a thick gasp. He stared at Robbo, hating him and yet wanting to stay with him at the same time. He shouldn’t have mentioned his mum. He should have left him alone. The cupboard would be finished today. Finished for ... ‘Yesterday, I found my mum d ... dead. Covered in blood. Don’t you think I’ve fucking faced it?’

‘Oh, lad.’ Robbo’s pale bloodshot eyes were watering too. Jake couldn’t stand it. Everyone had that same look when they spoke to him. Bony, the police. That almost crying overdose of sympathy.

‘I just want to make my cupboard!’

He hadn’t realised he’d shouted. Through the sizeable chink in the door, he could see The Major and Tombo staring at him. He could sense the rest of them. Robbo clenched his shoulders and then let them go. ‘We all ... well we kind of understand what you’re going through.’

Jake felt a smile curl on his lips. Did they? Could they – could anyone understand what it was like to find your mum stabbed to death. Did any of them have a clue?

‘No, you don’t,’ he said in a new and hard voice. ‘Now, can I get on with my cupboard, please?’

He walked from the storeroom. Everyone was looking. He knew that most of them held that same shitty expression he’d seen on Robbo’s smug teacher face. Fuck them.

Maddie sat beside him on the wall swinging her legs against the old brick. Her thighs in their thick black tights felt like heaven up against his own thin legs. For a moment, he transported himself and Maddie into bed, her warmth against his naked body. He wished he could feel glad of it, but he suspected she'd been sent by Robbo to talk him into going home.

'You okay?' she said, pressing her shoulder slightly up against his. They stared down at the grass.

'Yup.'

'You don't look it.'

'Hm. Wonder why?'

'Your mum ...? Listen Jake, I ... I'm so sorry. I can't imagine ...'

'No!'

'Jake, you don't have to be all defensive. We all care about you.'

Jake dropped lightly down from the wall. Some sixth formers were playing a game of rugby even though the ground was waterlogged and the sky purple with unshed rain. For the first time, he wished he was into sport and able to lose himself in the violence and tension of a match. Tech had been a disaster and what had been a cupboard was now a pile of wood on the bench.

Maddie tried again. 'How's your dad taken it? Are you staying with him? I wouldn't think you'd want to stay at home.'

He replied without thinking: 'Fuck Dad. He's *taken* it the same as he always does. By pissing off and doing some wanky pointless *research*.' The bile rose in his throat and he felt suddenly like crying again. Why was he stuck at Grampa's damp old place when Dad had a perfectly good flat?

'What?' She sounded genuinely shocked and he swallowed the rest of what he'd been going to say. He would have to curb his language.

'I'm stopping at my grampa's for a bit. Dad's working on a book.'

'Oh?' She offered him a chewy out of her packet of Wrigley's. 'Thought your mum was the author – Shit, sorry, I shouldn't have said owt...' She jumped down from the wall.

He shook his head. If people expected him to crack up at the mere mention of his mother, then the next few months were going to be hard work. He cleared his throat, made sure his voice was strong and clear. If he kept himself like that, upright and steady, kept the picture of his mum lying on the bed like that, out of his mind, he would be okay. 'Dad's a ... like, historian. You know, research and stuff. He's into Victorian times, mills and that ...'

'Oh.' She scuffed her shoes in the boggy ground. A fat raindrop plopped on her head. 'I never knew he had a job.'

He sniffed, embarrassed. 'He didn't for a while because he was ill and then Mum's book got famous, so he stopped home and did the cooking and stuff ...' *If you could call staring into space while your son went to the chippy, cooking.*

Maddie was very close to him, close enough for him to kiss her if she just turned around. But he couldn't. Not out here in full view of the school. In his blazer pocket, his phone bleeped a message and he pulled it out, grateful for something to do other than watch Josh Whetstone thunder round the field with the ball under his arm. It was another post on the Facebook tribute page one of her fans had set up. 'R. I. P. to Cathy Adams. Her work survives as a reminder to all that the wolf resides in all men.'

'Jake!' The detective woman from last night was here, at his school, striding across the grass towards him with some other woman a lot shorter than her who had to scurry to keep up.

'Fuck!' This wasn't fair. He'd come to school to get away, to try, for a few hours, to pretend everything was normal and now they'd followed him here and ruined it. He grabbed Maddie's hand, ready to make a run for it, but it was too late. The detective was only metres away, her and her mate looking out of place with their black suits and grim expressions, like a pair of undertakers with no funeral to go to.

'Jake, how are you?' The detective was a bit out of puff, but the plastic hair was still smoothly in place.

The breath caught in his lungs and he made an incomprehensible noise in response. Maddie touched his arm, concern flashing through those amethyst eyes.

'Have you found who did it yet?' he said.

The detective shook her head and not one hair moved. 'No, Jake, not yet, but we have a few leads to look into ... Is there somewhere we can sit for a minute. You and your friend ...?'

'Maddie Black,' Maddie said, shaking the detective's hand. 'There's nowhere to sit, I'm afraid. The year sevens will have taken all the benches.'

'I'm Detective Inspector Stephens and this is Detective Sergeant Jones,' she explained to Maddie, flashing her ID and indicating the other copper who was sweating with the effort of rushing across the field.

Jake shuffled in the mud of the playing field, his phone in his hand.

'I didn't expect to find you in school today,' the detective said.

He shrugged, wanting to avoid her stare. 'I wanted to finish my cabinet.' He'd begun it for Mum, painted those flowers all for her. It was for her birthday next month.

'We called the school earlier to let them know and they told us you were here. Are you sure you don't want to be home with your father?'

'No, I'm fine.' Josh Whetstone had some small lad on the ground in a tackle. Dimly, Jake was sorry for whoever was under that lardy body.

'Is there somewhere we can have a private chat? You're not under oath or anything, we just need to check a few details.' The detective stared pointedly at Maddie who shrugged.

'I've got to hand in my late Chemistry,' she said, stroking Jake's hand briefly. His skin tingled in response. 'I'll see you in a bit.' They watched her walk up towards the canteen, her amber hair swinging behind her.

'We're just trying to get a sense of your mum's last hours,' the detective began. 'I wonder if you could tell us again about the last time you saw her.'

His heart began to thud loudly. Josh had seized the ball and was running with it. Two mornings ago, he had believed she would be there forever.

'Talk us through what happened on Tuesday.'

He nodded. 'I just saw her on my way out, before school.'

'And everything was okay?'

Josh made a try, throwing his body down on the line. Jake felt the vom churning up in his throat. ‘Aye ... I ... I suppose so.’

Detective Rachel’s voice was soft. ‘Could you tell us again. How she was. What you said ...’

Fuck. This again. Drops of rain were beginning to patter on his blazer. The sky had darkened. Sergeant Jones coughed loudly. He looked up, working out if it was a ‘say something,’ kind of cough or just the result of too many cigarettes. She wasn’t even looking at him, but at Maddie.

‘We didn’t really ...’ Fuck, what had he said last night? ‘I had my breakfast and just said bye ...’

‘What did you eat?’ The detective’s reply was too quick.

He shrugged. There hadn’t been time for breakfast that morning. ‘Oh, not much. Coffee ... er. Toast?’

‘You said cornflakes last night.’ The detective was in like flint.

He swallowed, tried to appear like he didn’t care. ‘Yeah, well cornflakes *and* toast. Can’t really remember ...’ he turned away, his eyes filling. Not here. He couldn’t cry here where anyone could see him.

‘Look, we’re sorry to upset you,’ Jones began, her thick Lancashire vowels grating against Stephens’ posho London accent. ‘But do you know if your mum planned to meet anyone the day she died?’

His cheeks burned. The rain was getting heavier. He could almost feel each drop sizzle when it landed on his face. Detective Rachel stared down at him. It was hard to tell what she was thinking under that thick black fringe. She didn’t seem to mind the rain. ‘I am sure that you want to know who did this to his mother?’

He found himself nodding, dumbly, like some weird puppet.

‘You see, your mother had sustained some injuries; bruises that look as though they were made quite a few hours before she died. One on the back of her head. Another big one on her shoulder. It might be nothing, an accident. Or it might be ...’

The bell rang then; time to go back inside for lessons.

‘Did she mention that she’d fallen, banged her head?’

Fuck, the tears were coming now, spilling down his cheeks. He couldn't breathe. He couldn't speak. At his feet, the grass was wet, flattening into the soil with each step.

Detective Rachel put her hand on his shoulder as he slowly straightened up. 'We just need to know whatever you can remember,' she said, her voice like razor blades.

He nodded but could not meet her eyes.

Sergeant Jones sniffed. 'It will help us catch whoever who did this.'

It was difficult to speak. 'Sh ... she was seeing someone; a woman. The ... the night before, she stayed, all night. She left early in the morning ... the morning before Mum was murdered. At about five. I heard her car set off ...'

'Who?' Stephens turned and stared at him. Jones opened an umbrella and held it over both of them.

Now he had begun, the words tumbled over each other. 'H ... her name's Alex Wadsworth. She lives up at Briarside, on the farm there with the horses. She and my mum were ...'

'Were what?' Jones asked. The rain on the fabric of the umbrella sounded like pins rattling in a tin can.

'Dad would never have left if it hadn't been for her,' he said, his voice rising in pitch.

'And she stayed the night with your mother?' Detective Stephens stepped towards him, away from the protection of the umbrella, her black lace-ups squelching in the mud of the playing field. 'Why didn't you mention this last night? Why didn't your father?'

'Dad won't. He won't talk about her –'

'And it was definitely Wadsworth who stayed over?' Stephens demanded.

He nodded. 'I recognised her land cruiser. It's brown with horse stickers on the bumper.'

'So, their relationship was more than just friends?'

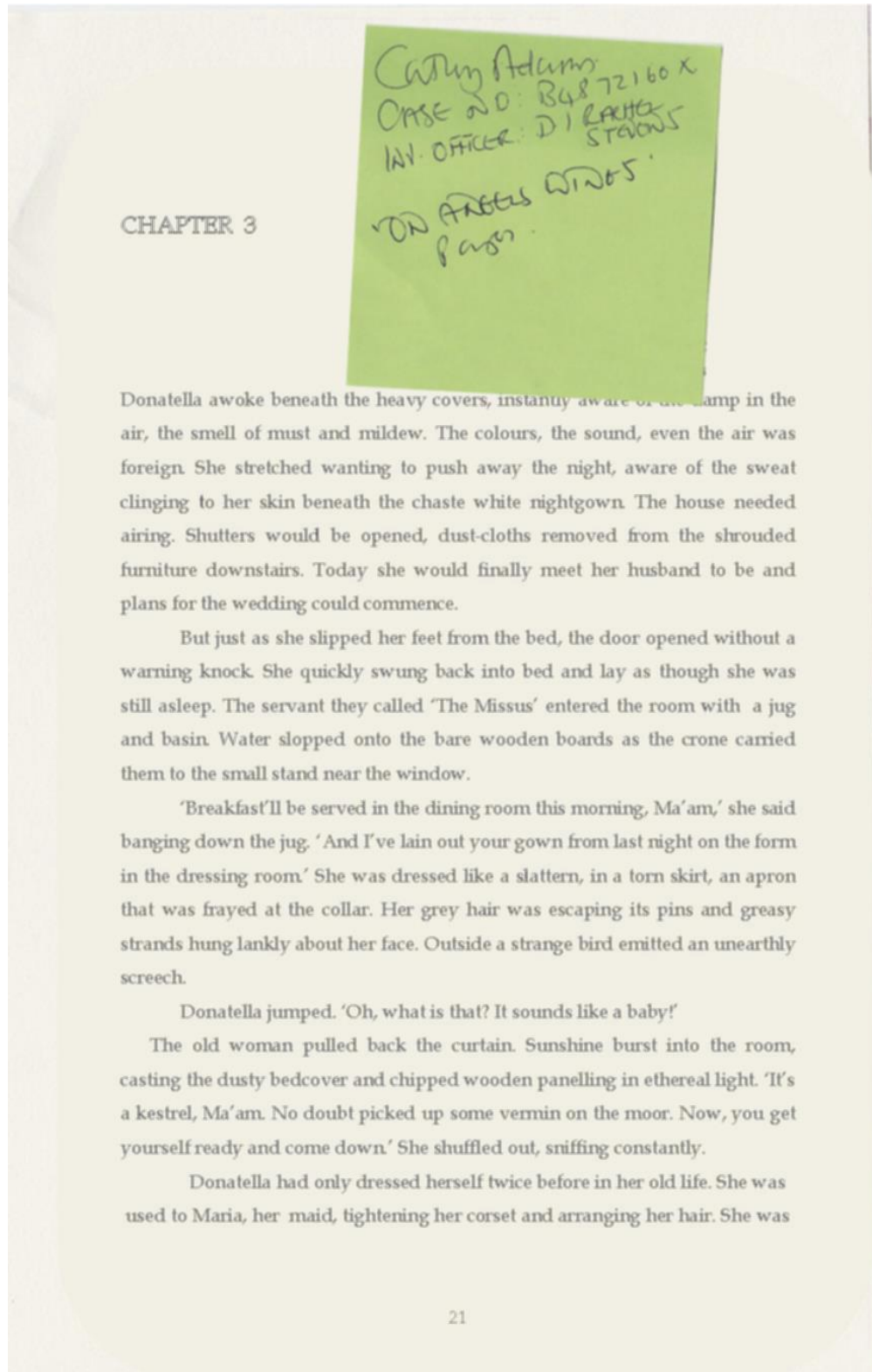
He looked away, over to where Josh and his friends were walking back to the school. They were covered in mud, their hair plastered to their heads. Again, his cheeks began to burn. 'I don't know. You'd have to ask Dad about that.'

'I am glad you have mentioned this.' The detective was evidently not happy. Without another word, she began to stomp off towards the gate, barking orders into her phone



‘We’ll be finished at the house in a few hours,’ Jones said breathlessly, she turned to follow. ‘Let us know when you’re ready. I’m sure you’ll need some stuff. We’ll do our best to find who did this.’

Her words rang like a threat as he set off back into the school.



## ON ANGELS' WINGS

used to standing before her old Chinese lacquer cabinet, her arms outstretched, ready for her chemise, her petticoats and dress to be fitted over her head. But in England things were different. Here, it was evident that she must fend for herself. She entered the so-called dressing room and was shocked to see her black poplin still spattered with mud, spread out over a wooden bench. At home she would never be expected to wear a gown in this condition. She moved it aside and looked inside the travelling bag that had accompanied her on the long journey from Milan. There was one dress inside, a light muslin summer white, far too flimsy for the time of year but it must suffice.

It was over an hour before she descended the stairs and another twenty minutes before she found the dining room. Not a single footman or maid did she see as she made her way through oak panelled rooms where thick, brocade curtains rotted on their poles and ancestral portraits glowered down, their paint peeling and cracked. She wondered at Elias's wealth, bound up as it was in his worsted mill at the bottom of the valley. Would it not stretch to some cleaning, some refurbishment? She would persuade him. Chillbeck House needed a woman's hand. It needed love and attention just as Elias did. The dining room was dominated by the table, an ugly, roughly hewn piece of furniture that had about it the air of the anatomy theatre. She resolved to rid the house of it as soon as she could. A small hand bell had been left at the centre and this she rang now, with some impatience for her stomach was growling with hunger. The thin gruel the Missus had prepared on her arrival last night had done little to make up for all she had lost through travel sickness. And where was Elias? Her heart fluttered a little as she recalled his handsome face poring over the accounts with her father. The success of their joint business venture surely augured a bright future for their marriage. As her father had joked, 'If good worsted can journey from Yorkshire to Milan, then my daughter can travel from Milan to Yorkshire and thrive.'

## Chris

Chris walked across the deserted skatepark, his metal detector clamped under his arm. A movement stirred the bushes on the north bank of the river: a shadow, a shape, half-hidden. His mother had always reckoned the place was haunted. He pulled the drawstring on his hood tight against his face. The rain was pelting harder and faster. There was no one up there in Undercliffe Woods, no one at all, only his stupid imagination peopling the place with the dead. No bones had ever been unearthed but he knew he was close, so close he could hear the cries of forgotten mill girls on the wind.

He had first heard the story as a nine-year-old schoolboy in the late nineteen-seventies – the decade which saw off the last of the big Rawton Bridge weaving companies. His teacher, Mr Greenwood, walked the whole class down from Underbank School on the steep South valley, into town, across the Gibbetroyd road, through the park and up into Undercliffe Woods. It was Autumn, the trees red and gold. He gathered the children of Class 6 around him and as the leaves fell and sunlight filtered through the branches, he related the ‘Great Mystery of Rawton Bridge’. The main plot was simple enough: in the year 1851, twenty-five young women who worked at Undercliffe Mill for Elijah Thomas had disappeared into thin air. One day they were carding, piecing and scavenging in the worsted works, the next, they were gone. This was the year typhoid, or, as it was known at the time, ‘enteric’ or ‘bowel’ fever came to Rawton and some believed the girls had succumbed, but there were other theories: that they had been sold on at a profit, or they had died of overwork or even been murdered. The woods were scoured for remains, but nothing was ever found. Mr Greenwood finished by telling them that Elijah Thomas had later paid for the sewers beneath the town, built the library, Flaights Chapel and Underbank school. Many believed that he was attempting to salve a guilty conscience.

The story took hold of nine-year-old Chris’s imagination. He decided that he was going to look for the missing mill girls, that it was his job, his duty to solve the mystery. For the first time since his mother had left, he could sleep. The following term, he was sent away to a private school to give his father space to work, but during holidays and the odd weekend he was allowed back home to Coldwater House, he would venture into

Undercliffe Wood, looking for hidden graves. The conviction that the young women had met a bad end was stronger than his grief for his mother.

Rooks burst from the treetops, making him jump. They felt it too, some presence in the woods beyond the river. He put down his metal detector, leaned against a concrete skate slope and lifted his Ordnance Survey map. Taking his pencil, he found the centre of plastic covered map and looked up. It rose innocently before him, less than quarter of a mile up from the park: the remains of Undercliffe Mill almost invisible against the tangle of birch and bramble. It was a ruin, a monument to more brutal times, its chimney just visible over the treetops. During the summer and autumn he had searched again around the south west area of the woods within two metres of the main mill building and knew, as far as he could, that unless the graves had been exceptionally deep, the girls were not buried there. To the south and south-east lay the imprints of the dyeing sheds which had been used right up until the twentieth century, so this was an unlikely spot. As the girls were paupers and the gaffer would have wanted to conceal their deaths, their bodies may have been interred to the east of the mill, north of Flaights Chapel graveyard. He squinted into the trees again, but the light was fading fast, and he could barely make out the chapel; its dark ashlar stonework was hard to spot even on the sunniest days. Rooks exploded from the trees, screeching in what he could only imagine was terror. Chris had to resist the impulse to run. Why was he so unnerved? Was he cracking up again?

Spring on Crimsworth Moor, near the Witches' stones; the sky a sweet and milky blue. Grouse flurried from nests among the heather, and hares sprang up from sun-blond reed. They were hunting for tadpoles, Cathy and Jake and he: the perfect family unit. They had packed sandwiches, Jake, a toddler then, potttered delightedly, free of the usual strictures of buggy or reins, his red hair glowing in the spring sunlight. The old hiking boots he'd had for years, the brown leather was cracked and split from the soles, peaty water oozed between his toes. But he didn't care. From up there, over five hundred metres above sea level, he could see right over into Lancashire where the hillsides became greener, more rounded, while in the Yorkshire below his feet, the landscape was dominated by rocks jutting from the hills. Romantic, even benign in the kindly light, what was left of the

seven mills: Sudefield, Rhodes, Winnow, Greenholme, Hubble, Lye and Undercliffe. The town tucked in the cleft between the hills, the smoke-blackened crenellations of his old school walls, the three entwining snakes of the railway, River Scaroyd and the Blackstone Road. On the north side, Flaights Chapel, almost as tall as Undercliff Mill. Other chapels had been deconsecrated, sold off as homes or even pubs, but Flaights remained as a stand against all that was secular. Some hardy souls still attended the Reverend Arkwright's Sunday service and it was said even now that his opinion held more sway in Rawton Bridge than that of the mayor or any of his councillors. Maybe a residual fear of damnation infested the town, an invisible legacy from the days when chapel and mill were the law.

At his feet, a small pond lay among the heather like a chip of mirror. Peering inside, beyond his own face, he saw tiny red stalks waving, as sinuous as hair under water. Jake drew near and he held his hot little hand, to show him the darting tadpoles, the dark movement of a newt. They both stood very still, breath held, waiting for Cathy to catch them up.

But she didn't. He turned from the pond and called to her, but she was out of sight. Clutching Jake's hand, he pulled him back the way they had come, picking over the stony ground, stumbling in the heather. She had not followed them. Instead, he found her sitting on a pile of stones, heaped together after the collapse of an old farmstead and threaded through with sedge grass and ivy.

'Kitten,' he shouted. 'Kitten-cat! We've found some –'

'Mama! Tad –tads!' Jake started towards her, but Chris pulled him back. The wind chill on his face. Cathy was staring blankly.

'Cat?'

When she saw them, her gaze went straight to Jake, her usual smile in place. 'Boys! Let's go back now. It's getting cold.'

'But we haven't had our picnic.' He felt a childish need to stamp his foot, to extract the very most from the day. 'Let's walk up to the witches and sit up there.' He hoisted Jake up onto his shoulders. 'Come on, another fifteen minutes and we'll be there.'

She stood up and stretched. The wind blew her dark hair across her face and she pushed it away impatiently. 'You can. I'm going home. I'm freezing.' She opened her rucksack and pulled out the carrier bag containing their lunch, the cheese sandwiches made by himself that morning, the 'treat' half bottle of wine, chocolate and cake.

'Cat, come on. It's so beautiful up here!' With an elaborate arm gesture, he displayed the wealth of the countryside, the best two counties had to offer, but she shrugged and turned away.

'I want to go home,' she said. 'I can't stand it. Too cold. Too open. And look at the state of my trousers.' She indicated her mud-spattered jeans. 'I'll take Jake if you want.'

'I don't!' he shouted. 'I want all of us to go for a walk. It's bank holiday. It's what families *do*. Look how beautiful it is!' But the wind whipped his voice away

She looked beyond him, down into the town and he saw that she was shivering quite violently despite her thick gortex jacket. 'I ... I can't.' Her eyes were streaming. 'I can't, Chris. L ... Look. The town down there. From here it looks like a bloody grave. I ... can't st ... stand it up here.'

'Mummy!' Jake had caught it too. That expression in her voice; a naked terror. He struggled to get down from Chris's shoulders.

'I'm sorry.' She was crying. 'I ... it's just me, but I can't stop thinking about *death*. It's like I'm *choking*. We should never have come here, Chris. We could have stayed on in Leeds. This place ... It's too ... It will *kill* me!' And then she turned and began to run, blundering over the rough terrain, as though something was at her back, pursuing her. He tried to follow but the bottom of his right boot came away and his foot was suddenly squelching in the brackish water. He stopped, set Jake down, thinking to tie the boot together somehow, just to get home. But it was already too late. His foot was soaked, and Cathy was gone.

'Mummy?' Jake soldiered onward, determination in his sturdy little limbs. Chris swung down and scooped him up.

'Mummy's going home,' he explained, trying to keep his voice even and calm, though the old dread was rising. 'And, hooray, she's left us with our picnic.'

The wind was biting and the sky that only moments earlier had been cloudless blue was suddenly dark with rain clouds. Jake began to cry. 'Want Mummy, want Mummy.' He struggled in Chris's arms, his little fists curled, beating on his back.

'Let's have our food first.' He set him down on the stones and began to unpack the sandwiches, but the child had other ideas and began to run, fighting through the stones and reeds, his coat billowing around him like a sail. Chris left him for a few moments, sure that he would turn back when he realised no one was following, but Jake did not look back. Chris abandoned the sandwiches and limped after him as the rain began to fall into the heather.

That had been the beginning; the first time she ever admitted how much she hated the place. Since, she had occasionally mentioned being unhappy, but she never forced the issue. He'd believed, then, it was because she understood that Rawton was in his blood, its DNA running through him like letters through a stick of rock. His life's work was here; it was his home and she was his wife.

His phone went, the ringtone urgent in the muted soundscape of the park. Without looking at the number, he picked up.

'Did you do it?' Alex Wadsworth sounded drunk and accusing. 'Did you kill her?'

'Of course, I didn't.'

'I don't believe you.'

He turned the phone off and began to walk as the rain drove into his eyes and blew through the gaps in his hood. The park gates were in sight, tall curlicues of black wrought iron silhouetted against the street-lit scene beyond. There, the nik-nak shops, the rainbow cafes, crystal healers and candle emporiums would be shutting up for the evening. The buskers would be going home, the street artist packing up his canvas. In the hinterland of the park and the wilderness of Undercliff Woods and Craggside beyond, it was hard to believe that life in Rawton Bridge went on as normal.

He could feel the soft lichen and moss patinating the iron gates beneath his fingertips. He pushed, and they swung open. On the main road a police car screamed into the night



off, no doubt, to the badlands of Blackstone. Up Wesley Street a cherry picker was putting up Christmas lights on the new Victorian lampposts, erected last year for the Arts Festival.

He smiled to himself, turning back to look at the mill, now absorbed by the dark woods. ‘Cathy,’ he said, softly, ‘I’m not cracking up. I’m *working*.’

Plate 8



## Bony

‘It’d be a real favour, old man.’ Humph’s plummy tones grated down the phoneline. ‘Think of it as putting something *back*.’ Bony winced. Ever the publicist, Humphrey Lyde had always followed whatever fad was going. And he was a sucker for a pretty face and a pair of long legs. They’d been undergraduates together in London way back in the sixties and never quite managed to lose touch, though it hadn’t been for want of trying on Bony’s part. Whatever Humph wanted him to do now, there was bound to be a girl involved.

‘Normally, I’d be glad to help, man, but you know, my family need me. After what happened to Cathy ... Now’s not really the time ...’ He closed his eyes. Cathy’s death, her *murder* hadn’t quite sunk in yet.

‘Awful business,’ Humph agreed. ‘Heard about it on the radio.’ He left a polite pause. ‘But this little project will help take your mind off it ... And she is very easy on the eye.’

‘She?’ Bony checked the clock and stared out of the window. Today Cragside was in a fierce mood. Rocky outcrops gleamed like wet blackberries against the rain-washed heather. The sky lowered, pewter-grey streaked with hazy tin. Without thinking, he squeezed a smear of purple madder onto his palette. He had lived in this landscape for over forty years and only now was he ready to paint it.

‘Nice woman. Sam Fountain. Mature student. She’ll need to be with you a couple of days, no more. Interview you in that god-forsaken northern outpost you’ve ended up in –’

‘Is that her real name?’

‘Ha, I knew you’d be interested! She’s an art history MA – at our *alma mater*. Miss Fountain has this zany idea of recreating a *lives of the artists*. Like Vasari’s masterpiece, you know? But hers will be all on film. A snapshot of the “most excellent” artists working

in this country at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Marcus reckons it'll be as important as Vasari's sixteenth century *Vite*...

Bony zoned out. Humph had been born with a silver spoon in his mouth; never had to work or make a name for himself, just hung around art colleges, skimming the cream of each fresh crop of outgoing students and promoting them for a few months until they either made it or didn't. Quite a few household names were down to him, but there was plenty of road-kill on the way. Sam, whoever she might be, was just the latest in a long line.

'Bony, are you listening?'

'Me, yeah, course I am. All ears.' Bony added some umber to the mix, squinting at the rocky outcrops to get an overall impression of the colour contrasts. A streak of gold showed up, the treasure lurking within the millstone grit. A fingernail scrape of ochre should do it.

'Marcus reckons Miss Fountain's going to be the 'it' girl of art history in a year or two. She's got some names for her vlog already – a potter and a graffiti artist... those Brit Art types, you know, the totty who did the fried tomatoes one ... You'll be among the great and the good, old man. Sam came through Goldsmith's as an undergrad too, and with you wearing the old school tie, I thought you might want to help. She's keen to get you. It was her that suggested –'

'Hey, you know, that's great, only –'

Humph chuckled. 'And let's face facts, old man. It's been a while since you did anything noteworthy. Not since the seventies ...' He stopped and began to cough, gasping for breath down the phone.

Bony glanced up at the clock. One-fifteen. He'd planned to get his painting sketched out by now. '*I'm* doing just fine, Humphrey; you're not sounding too good yourself though.'

More coughing. 'Lungs packing in. Hang on while I get my puffer. That's it. Christ, don't you hate old age? Now, Bony. This will *rehabilitate* you. You can't keep going on those miserable local commissions ... Anyway, old man, Sam will be in Rawton Bridge as soon as you give the nod. She will be hot news. You, at the moment, are chip-paper.'

A click and Bony was abandoned to the not unpleasant hiss of the exchange universe. He put down the phone and sighed. Before any reply was fully formed in his mind, the phone went again.

‘And Bony?’

‘Humph.’

‘So sorry ... About your son’s wife. Every social media site is buzzing with it. Now, Cathy Adams, she is news. Hotter dead than alive, you might say, it’s been a few years since *On Angels’ Wings*. Though, thinking about it, you probably say different, eh, old man? Bit of a looker, wasn’t she?’

The bile rose. Bony needed a spliff and badly. To Humph, who had never married or even lived with anyone as far as he knew, all women were fair game. ‘Man, you never stop, do you? I’m going now ... And yes, the answer’s yes to that Sam chick.’

Humph’s smugness oozed down the line as he signed off. ‘You are an officer and gent, old boy. Toodlepip.’

Bony sat down and skinned up a humdinger, ignoring any qualms he felt about dealing with Humphrey. It might be nice to have a woman about the place, even if was just for a couple of days. It might take his mind off things, maybe help Jake ... But where was Jake? He hadn’t clapped eyes on him since he high-tailed off to school again first thing this morning. Why did he want to go to school anyway, when his mother had just been murdered. The world quaked as the reality of her death hit him again. The last woman in his studio had been Cathy. Seven years ago, she’d helped research the subject matter for some murals in Leeds. A restaurant had commissioned him to paint some famous city scenes and Cathy had gone out with her camera to The Calls and the Corn Exchange, the Town Hall with its famous golden owls and even Roundhay Park with its placid lake and butterfly house. Each time she returned from the city, he’d detected a new light in her eye, a bounce in her step. She had loved the project, talked nonstop about the buildings she had photographed, the snippets of history she’d gleaned. If only he could have done more.

Bony scrabbled for his matches. He took in Cragside’s subtle changes of tone. A hint of pink lightened the rock as the rain eased off and a shimmer of light delineated the edges

of the three-pointed witch rocks, halfway up the hillside, their cauldron a hollowed-out plate between them. Alizarin crimson mixed with ochre. That was it. His brush jabbed at a small wooden board that he kept as part palette, part painting, like a notebook near at hand. If he could just get this colour right, just the hint of ... It was no good, he couldn't put it to the back of his mind: Oh, Chrissie, what the hell have you done?

He heard the front door click and looked up at the clock on the wall. Nearly four already. The days went so fast.

'Grampa?' Jake hollered down the hall. 'You in?'

Bony stood up and stretched his stiff limbs. 'Yup, in the studio, Jake. Come on in!'

The kid clattered down the bare boards of the hall, his agitation obvious. 'Grampa, look at this. It's fucking *obscene*!' Jake burst into the studio, looking wild, skinnier than he'd been that morning, if it was possible. He was wet from the rainstorm, shaking like a beaten dog. He held out his phone for Bony to see, but it was difficult to read; the screens on these things were so small, the letters miniscule. 'Look what some bastard has written!' he shouted. 'Just look!'

Bony squinted but couldn't see. Impatiently, Jake snatched it away. 'Cathy Adams was a bitch and a filthy liar,' he shouted, waving the phone again under his nose. 'Why would anyone post that on Facebook? When Cath ... my mum has died?'

'I don't know, kid.' Bony stared at his painting, unwilling to meet his grandson's eyes. The crag was emerging from the thickly applied paint. 'But from what I hear, these social network sites attract all kinds of head-cases.'

'But you just wouldn't, would you? Put something like that on a *tribute* page. One set up by her fans? Whoever is in charge should take it down.'

There sure was some nasty stuff going on these days. Sometimes Bony wanted transporting back to a time when everything had seemed so much more innocent. 'Is there any name with it – any clue to the identity of whoever sent it?'

Jake threw the phone down into the muddle of oil-paint tubes on his table. 'Someone called *Miller*. But bet it's not their real name.'

‘You’ll have to take this to the cops, you know.’ Reluctantly, Bony wiped his brush on a rag oozing with turpentine and put it down next to the others. ‘They might be able to trace this guy...’

For a moment, Jake’s face lit up from within. ‘You’re right. They’ll be able to trace it back to the server –’ And then his shoulders fell again. ‘There’s no point is there? No fucking point. They’re already looking at the Facebook pages. They’ll know about this, probably before me. He picked up his phone and stomped out of the studio.

Bony took up his brush again and attempted to flick a fine spray of pink across the canvas, pulling the hoghair bristles against his thumb. But his aim was not true; the moment had passed. Jake required his attention more than the painting, more than Humph’s protégé. He needed to find a way to reach him.

REPORT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

NAME: Christopher Mark Adams

DATE OF BIRTH: 7<sup>th</sup> July 1971

PARENTS: Derek 'Bony' Adams

EDUCATION: Currently studying for a B.A. in history

MEDICAL HISTORY: No previous interventions

12<sup>th</sup> May 1990

I initially interviewed Mr Christopher Adams at his father's home in Rawton Bridge. He was well groomed and clean-shaven, wearing clothes appropriate to the cold weather. Mr Adams nodded when I asked him whether he understood the purpose of the interview. He did not, at any point during the interview, make eye contact. Mr Adams' father had previously given me a brief outline of his concerns, namely that Christopher appeared to have 'lost interest' in life. He had been sent home from university after the caretaker was called to break into his bedroom in the halls of residence where he had barricaded himself. Christopher had not been seen by fellow students or tutors for over a month. His father believes that Christopher's depression was caused by his mother leaving the family when he was eight years old. Throughout the interview, Christopher remained still, though, occasionally, he would stare fixedly at a point behind my left ear. Although he responded monosyllabically to my questions, he appeared alert and physically well. At this point I was unable to make an accurate assessment and arranged a further appointment at the infirmary for a month hence.

28<sup>th</sup> June 1990

Mr Adams was admitted to the Psychiatric wing of Leeds Infirmary on 26<sup>th</sup> June after making an attempt on his own life. When I visited him on the ward, he was sitting on the edge of his bed looking at the floor. He did not acknowledge me when I sat beside him and did not answer any of my questions. His hair was unkempt, he was unshaven and smelled stale. He did not move from his position throughout my visit. When I advised him to take a shower, he did not respond. I prescribed Amitriptyline and advised him to go home and maintain a sensible diet, while taking plenty of rest and exercise.

15<sup>th</sup> September 1990

Mr Adams' condition has improved enormously. When he arrived at my treatment room, he greeted me with enthusiasm. He was very well groomed and maintained eye contact throughout the meeting. I asked him how he had got on with the medication and he told me that he had 'chucked it down the toilet'. He said he had felt 'overworked' and 'stressed out' by university life but was 'okay now'. I asked him whether he felt his depression was linked to the disappearance of his mother and he laughed, saying that she 'died years ago', he had 'long since moved on'. He told me that he now had a girlfriend and that he would not be coming to see me again.

I am concerned by the speed of his recovery and the way in which he minimised the impact of his mother's leaving, when his father had



## Chris

Chris lay awake till the early hours, trying not to think about Cathy. Each time he drifted off, a memory would send his heart hammering: Cathy the day he met her back in the early nineties, laughing and dancing to 'Achy Breaky Heart' in the student union bar of Leeds Uni, came to him at one in the morning. Her dark hair was cut short back then, exposing her neck. He'd joked that he wanted to sink his teeth into it. Cathy holding the new-born Jake in her arms appeared in his dreams at two-fifteen. She was weeping, holding the child out like a sacrifice. He awoke drenched in sweat, despite the chill of the winter night. It had taken ages to get back to sleep. When, just after four, the photo on the back of Cathy's book swam into his consciousness, he gave up any notion of sleep and left his bed.

He made himself a cup of strong tea and surveyed his newest pieces of evidence, spread out on the formica table in the kitchenette. It was all very well for Bony to complain, for Jake to scoff, but what had once been an inquiry had now become a crusade. This was what gave his life meaning, it was his life's work; he could no sooner stop this research than he could stop breathing. The twenty-five young women of the Parish of Liverpool who were bound over to Elijah Thomas of Undercliff Mill, Rawton Bridge had not been easy to find. Although many such documents were now available through ancestry sites on the internet, their documents of indenture had remained in a dusty corner of the Select Vestry Archive in the Records office in the Central Library and he'd had to physically track them down and pay for copies to be made and sent. Although they couldn't locate the bodies of the apprentices, they suggested that twenty-five girls had been indentured to Thomas's mill and never returned at the end of their contract; they were a tangible piece of evidence, needed if his work was ever going to be taken seriously.

He listed the names of the girls in the leather-bound notebook that Cathy had bought him a few years back: Eliza Donahue, Mary-Anne Smith, Charlotte Cobb, Elizabeth Oldroyd ... Names that could be found in any classroom today. They ranged from nine to thirteen years of age. Elijah Thomas received five guineas per head from the Parish on receiving them, and another five once they'd been with him a year. Chris totted up the



figures. Altogether, they would have brought him a sum of five-hundred guineas which no doubt paid for the improvements to his Undercliffe mill. Between 1841 and 1845, he'd built a house for the apprentices, extended the weaving sheds and the dye works. All payments were meticulously listed in Thomas's accounts for the period, now stored in the archives of Gibbetroyd House Museum. In 1843, work had also begun on a fine tomb for Elijah, up near the top of Cragside. Not bad, considering many of the girls he employed worked over twelve hours a day and never received more than four shillings and sixpence per week.

But, still, Elijah Thomas was known as a good employer. The Undercliff worsted works had been inspected only months before the disappearance of the girls and he received praise for the lack of corporal punishment, adherence to Fielding's 'Ten Hour' act and workers receiving sick pay. So why would this businessman, well respected in his home town, choose to say nothing when twenty-five young girls in his employ went missing?

The greyed photocopies could not disguise the ragged edge of the original documents, revealing that each had once been part of a larger sheet of paper. The other section would have been given to Thomas with each girl. Only upon the completion of the period of indenture – 2nd October 1851 – would the two halves of each sheet have been reunited and the apprentice to whom it belonged, freed. These indentures had never been completed and remained the property of the Parish of Liverpool. Could this be the result of an oversight or was there, as Chris had always believed, a more sinister explanation?

He slipped the documents into a plastic sleeve and added them to an already bulging lever arch file. He suspected that there were clues to the fate of the girls all around him, written into the very fabric of the town, the buildings Thomas erected, the inscriptions on plaques, benches, books; hints in local paintings, newspaper articles, accounts and records. But so far, he had found nothing to pin down why and where the girls had gone. He resigned himself to another day of squinting at the old-fashioned microfiche in the library and hoping that a vital nugget of information would make itself apparent.

At eight-thirty it was barely light. Water poured from a broken gutter and splashed past the kitchen window. Traffic on the Gibbetroyd Road was almost at a standstill. The stench of diesel seeped through the walls. In wet weather the fumes hung in a low-lying fug at the valley bottom that made the locals cough almost as badly as they had until the Clean Air Act of 1956, when unrestricted mill chimneys and domestic hearths still belched out black smoke. But he knew he must get dressed and go out into it. The library opened in an hour, leaving him just enough time for a shower and a bowl of cereal.

The doorbell rang. He peered into the hall; two dark figures were distorted by the bubbly glass of the seventies door. As he opened it a blast of chilly air whipped up from the stairwell. Dread thudded through him when he recognised DI Stephens' unmistakeable dark helmet of hair.

'Hello, Mr Adams, sorry to disturb you so early.' She looked meaningfully at his dressing gown and then beyond him, into the flat, as though she expected a mass murderer to be lurking within. 'We just have a few more questions.' She held out her hand, clad in a black leather glove. His own hands were warm, and he was reluctant to touch it. When he did, her grip was slightly too firm, almost challenging, but she pulled away quickly and indicated her colleague. 'This is Detective Sergeant Jones. She is working on the case with me.'

Chris stared at the women. Jones was older, her skin lined and over-tanned, hair like steel wool. She nodded tersely, avoiding eye contact.

'May we come in?' DI Stephens asked.

He flushed, realising that he looked a mess; his dressing gown flapped open, revealing ancient pyjamas that once belonged to Bony. 'I was just about to get dressed—'

'We won't keep you.' She brushed past him, smelling of fresh soap and outdoors. No doubt she was one of those women who were up at the crack of dawn jogging or at the gym. Every movement spoke of lithe athleticism. They entered his bed-sitting room, making it feel even smaller than usual. He'd folded the bed back into a sofa, but the quilt had not yet been put away and the room was stuffy, a smell of sleep, bad breath and feet. Stephens was unperturbed. She perched on the edge of the sofa and smiled at him. Jones remained silent, four-square in the doorway, as though she was prepared to use her body

to stop him escaping. He took the only other seat in the room; a plastic stacker chair he had bought second-hand for two quid. Stephens gazed at him for a moment or two, like a cat assessing its prey, then went for the jugular.

‘Why didn’t you mention Alex Wadsworth?’

He put his right index finger to his mouth, slid his tongue around to find a corner of nail that wasn’t already chewed. ‘I didn’t think it was necessary.’ This wasn’t true, and he could tell she knew it. Her eyebrows formed a perfect arc of cynicism.

‘Don’t worry, Chris, you are not under oath. We just need to fill in some details. It seems that Alex was close to Cathy?’

The truth was that Alex Wadsworth made him feel inadequate. She divided him from Cathy, fortifying her defences, putting her out of his reach. He held the nail between his incisors and bit down. He remembered their last conversation, her accusing tone. She knew too much.

DI Stephens leaned forward, her steely eyes challenging. ‘Was Cathy’s relationship with her the cause of your marriage break-up?’

To distract himself, he thought of the file on the kitchen table, of the evidence he was collecting against Elijah Thomas. Without this evidence, Thomas was just a philanthropic local businessman. The clue must lie in those around him, his family, perhaps, or business colleagues. If he killed the girls, then someone must have helped him. According to the final inspection report, the workers at Undercliff Mill were well fed and not overworked. The question was, how could twenty-five apparently healthy young women be murdered so easily, without anyone hearing anything? And why?

‘Mr Adams, I asked you a question.’ DI Stephens’ voice was raised in irritation. ‘Was your wife’s relationship to Alex Wadsworth a factor in your breakup?’

Who could have been Elijah Thomas’s accomplice, one of his fellow parish councillors, an employee? He darted a glance at the DI. She had settled back into the sofa, pulling one of the green chequered cushions onto her lap, giving the illusion of making herself at home.

‘When we spoke to Miss Wadsworth, yesterday, after Jake told us of her friendship with your mother, she suggested that your marriage was in trouble for some years before you finally split.’

He felt a prickle of irritation. Outside, an ambulance screamed along the Gibbetroyd Road. Who the hell was Alex Wadsworth to judge their marriage? He breathed deeply and looked above DI Stephens to the single picture on the wall. It had been in the flat when he took it on, a generic watercolour of rounded hills and scudding clouds, now faded to pastel hues. It was a soft southern-looking landscape, the rolling Cotswolds or the Chiltern Hills, the complete opposite of the harsh landscape around Rawton, though in curly black lettering at the bottom of the picture, were the words, ‘Scardale Valley 1874’.

‘Alex is lying,’ he muttered. In the end, all history came down to one person’s word against another’s. If Hitler had won the war, the school book history of Europe prior to World War Two would have been written very differently. Elijah Thomas’s part in the girls’ disappearance was bound to be very different to the ‘mystery’ idea of contemporary accounts. He stared at the painting, an idea slowly forming.

DI Stephens opened her briefcase. It was black and glossy like her hair. She took out a copy of Cathy’s photograph, the one that had been used on her book. The photo made her look half dead already; ghostly, her eyes hidden in shadow, dark hair hanging in limp curtains around her face. The publishers had liked it, said it fitted the supernatural themes of her novel but to him it looked like someone waiting for something terrible to happen. ‘Cadaverous,’ had been his pronouncement, when she revealed it that first time.

DI Stephens propped the picture up on the sofa beside her, making Cathy a part of the conversation. ‘Sergeant Jones turned up something I’d like to run past you. Just to see what you think. Probably not relevant, but it doesn’t hurt to check.’

‘Okay?’ His smile was tight. Time was ticking away. It was getting on for nine and he wanted to be at the library. There must be others who were close to Elijah Thomas. Who had been his associates, who were his friends?

Jones moved in closer. She smelled of stale tobacco. She stared down at him, her bulk blocking the miserable light. Overbearing, despite her small stature. He knew she was about to say something she considered significant.

‘On July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2012, you attempted suicide.’ She paused, obviously awaiting his reaction. He gave nothing away, so she carried on: ‘Four packets of paracetamol washed down with seventy centilitres of vodka. Police called at 4am by Catherine Adams to break down the door of your bathroom. You were lucky they caught you in time.’

His head was throbbing now. Why had they dug this up?

‘You had been together, what, eighteen years?’ DI Stephens’ voice was so soft, a welcome contrast to the gravelly timbre of her colleague. ‘Why would you want to kill yourself?’

He stood up and went to the window. This was not fair, not fair at all. He had been under immense pressure. They would never understand. And now Cathy was dead, and he had work to do. He opened the window and took gulps of damp air. ‘Why does this matter?’

‘As I said, we just need to sketch in more of the background.’ DI Stephens was behind him now. ‘Just to help build a picture of your life together.’

He could still taste the chalky bitterness of the pills, the acidic burn of the alcohol. The bathroom had reeked of Cathy, her perfume, her pots of creams and makeup. When he’d sought his own face in the many mirrors that reflected each other, it seemed he could only see Cathy, image upon image upon multiple image of her, each darker than the last as they funnelled into the night.

‘I’d lost my job. It got to me ...’ His voice broke a little and he gripped the windowsill.

‘Where were you working?’ Stephens was obviously writing things down.

‘The Further Education College in Blackstone. Teaching history part time. Then came the cutbacks and a new head.’ This was easier, a tangible subject he knew and understood. It provided a comforting and accessible backstory. ‘The whole place was reorganised. A *Top-down restructure* they called it. They got rid of management staff, then the school of Continuing Education closed; they ditched all the shorter courses, the ones I taught on ... Then they began on the teachers ...’

Jones nodded. ‘Shame.’ Her voice went seamlessly from understanding to officious. ‘According to Miss Wadsworth, your marriage was beginning to suffer then.’

‘It must have been a tough time for you,’ The DI interjected, behind him. ‘Was this before or after you lost your job?’

Chris’s heart thumped painfully. Below him, on the Gibbetroyd Road, a cyclist wove through the traffic jam, dextrous and free. He felt the chains of the past binding him more tightly than ever. ‘Look, what has this got to do with anything? It was years ago but if you must know, it was *before*.’

‘But it was well over two years before you left the marriage.’ Jones was back in the driving seat. ‘Cathy even put the house up for sale to force you out –’

‘What?’ When would they let up from this incessant questioning?

Jones sniffed. ‘The estate agent in Rawton confirmed that the house was put on the market in early May 2012, around the time Cathy originally asked you to leave. Is this correct?’

‘Why are we talking about this?’ he demanded, his voice sounding odd even to himself, strained and too high. He leaned his forehead against the windowpane, glad of the cold.

‘See here,’ Jones replied, clearing her throat and scrolling down her mobile phone. ‘They had it on Cathy’s records. An offer had been agreed when the house was suddenly taken off their books – two weeks after your suicide attempt. Was that your decision?’

Chris shook his head. He wanted them to go now, so that he could get dressed, start his day’s work. How could any of this be relevant to Cathy’s death? Of course, it hadn’t been his decision! None of it was ever his decision. The house was in Cathy’s name. She bought it with the money she inherited from her parents. It was always *her* house. If she wanted to sell it then she would have done, nothing he said would have made the slightest bit of difference.

Jones looked at her watch and tutted. ‘The estate agent remembered Cathy coming in to stop the sale going through. He recognised her from her book cover. ’

The panic was rising now. The breath caught in his chest, his heart bashed against his ribs. ‘I didn’t know anything about –’

Jones had obviously scented his fear. ‘Why do you think she took the house off the market?’

He leaned back, hard against the window, wanting it to give, wanting it to crack and smash all over his skull, releasing him from the torment of their questions. Sometimes he wished the paracetamol and vodka had done their worst before he was found. But Cathy had promised him it would be okay, cradled his head in her arms as they waited with the police for the ambulance. She promised not to sell up and leave him.

‘I think that’s enough now, Jane,’ DI Stephens said, her voice bland. ‘Mr Adams has work to be getting on with.’

He shook his head and waited by the window as they said their goodbyes and left. He watched the rain bouncing up from the pavement below, the passers-by ducking under their umbrellas, and thought of murdered mill girls hidden outside the church wall, of Elijah Thomas’s associates, of stories and counter stories and the way history got made.

Plate 10



*Group of Victorian women, sepia colour [photo] private collection, Halifax*



## Jake

Wrenching open the door of Bony's spare bedroom, Jake almost fell over a half open box on the floor. It was one of many. Objects of varying degrees of weirdness were strewn all over the place: propped-up paintings, tribal masks, limbs from shop dummies, there was even a plaster-cast of what looked like someone's knob. The wardrobe, if that was what it was, had tilted and looked about to fall over; on top, layers of paper or paintings of whatever were piled haphazardly like a bad attempt at Jenga, fused together with years of dust. Some had slipped down, others were on the verge of doing so. Paintings of scenery, portraits and creepy ink-blotty things had been hung at crazy angles from the picture rail. There was not a square centimetre of carpet or wallpaper to be seen. Whatever colour the room had been was now lost to Bony's crap.

All the same, Grampa had said there was a Hummingbird in here somewhere, a freakin' Hummingbird, as strummed by the likes of Jimmy Page and Marc Bolan. He'd be a fool not to look for it.

Cautiously, he stepped around a heap of fabric, fancy stuff, velvet and the like, sneezing as dust and cobwebs flew up. He kicked aside a large leather art portfolio and it fell apart. Hummingbirds were just about the coolest retro guitar you could buy and if he was ever going to master chords and join a band, he needed something better than the cheap hand-me-down Squier with the broken neck his mum had passed on. She'd been in a band years ago, some mad punk outfit that were still going all these years later. Minus his mum, of course – she'd left that behind when she left uni. But occasionally, they'd be in the gig listings of the local paper and she'd go all misty eyed and talk about her student days, before she met Dad. He swallowed back the lump in his throat. All morning he'd managed not to think of his mum; to blank her out. He'd even switched his phone off to stop himself obsessively looking at the tribute page. Now he'd remembered her while he was looking for the very thing he'd hoped would take his mind off her for a while.

'Hey, how'd you get in there?' The door creaked and Bony poked his head around. Dust swirled in the gloom. He looked like some character from *Horrible Histories*. His thin hair was too long and fluttered around his head, showing the baldy bits.

‘It wasn’t easy.’ Jake wiped his eyes and looked hopelessly around the room. Somewhere underneath this mess was a bed and probably other normal things like some drawers and stuff – this used to be his dad’s bedroom when he was growing up. If he couldn’t see the furniture he had little chance of finding a guitar. ‘Looking for that Hummingbird you told me about.’

‘Ah.’ Bony pushed into the room and stood there looking about. His jumper was full of holes and the smell of old tobacco seemed to surround him like a force-field. ‘It’s in here somewhere. The wardrobe. You tried in there?’

Jake was nearest. He clambered over a pile of anonymous boxes and wrenched at the door. It was stuck fast. ‘Grampa, you got a key to open this, it seems to be locked?’

‘It’s jammed, maybe because the guitar is in there,’ Bony joked. ‘*Jammin*’, you get it, like Bob Marley? You just need to give it a good pull.’

‘Whatever.’ God, why did the old man try to tell jokes? Jake wrenched at the handle, the whole wardrobe shook and the pile of paintings, some framed, some still nailed on their original wooden stretchers, began to cascade down onto the cluttered carpet bringing with them a cloud of dust. ‘Oh, I’m sorry!’ He tried to catch them, but they were too heavy, some were pretty big, larger than the top of the wardrobe and they hadn’t been stacked very well. He had to step back to avoid being knocked out.

‘Jeez, man!’ Bony barged towards him. ‘Don’t get yourself killed ...’

The final painting slid down and managed to flip itself over. They both watched as it turned and settled itself on its back. Jake knew by the look of horror on his grandfather’s face that there was something very wrong about this picture. Everything went in slow motion. He moved forward to get a better look, but Grampa was there before him, picking up the canvas and attempting to hide the image by turning it to his chest. He was too slow.

‘Is tha ... *Mum*?’

Bony held the canvas close. He looked very old suddenly; old and fucked. ‘It’s not ... It’s an experiment, man. Nothing to worry yourself with ...’

Jake kicked aside the debris between them and forced the canvas out of his grandfather’s grip; the old man didn’t put up much resistance. It wasn’t finished, and a

lot of the background was smeary, but the subject of the painting was clear. Mum was sitting, her legs to one side, staring in that kind of stern way she had on the cover of her book, but in this she also looked like she was giving whoever was looking at the picture the come-on. She was naked, totally fuckin starkers except for some wispy material thing covering her bits. It was obvious he'd spent a long time over the body. It looked more finished and the skin was painted in pastelly colours on her tits and stomach. Freakin hell, why had his grandfather painted his mother with no clothes on? And why had she posed for him like that?

Gently, Bony moved forward, took the painting, propped it against the skirting board, turned against the wall. 'Your mum worked for me, you know.'

Jake glared at him, his whole body tense. He wanted to lash out and punch his stupid skinny grandfather so hard he smashed his head against one of those plaster cast things. If Grampa painted her looking like that, what was going on between them? It was sick, all of it.

'You've got to understand –' Grampa looked as though he was about to cry, his face was all crumpled. He patted his shorts, no doubt looking for his roll up tin.

'Does Dad know about this?'

Grampa found the tin and began to open it. 'Jeez, no ... It was ... Oh, son, it was years ago now, when your mum helped me out. She was bored as hell stuck home all day. You were nine or ten, getting independent. She'd applied for a few jobs, but it was hard for her, with Chris spending all his time in the library. You still needed picking up from school. She came and worked for me for a day or two each week, so she could always be there for you...'

'In the nude?' Grampa had a freakin nerve. Like he was trying to blame it on him for going to school.

'Of course not. She took photos ...'

'And sat round with no clothes on while you painted her like an old perv –'

'No! She needed to work, and I needed a photographer.' Grampa had tucked the roll-up into the corner of his mouth and pulled his old lighter from his pocket. The air was so thick with dust, Jake worried he might choke; the smell of petrol from the lighter made it

even more gross. He tried get past his grandfather to the door. If he stayed listening to this shit much longer, he was going to vom.

‘Your mother was a good photographer.’ Grampa said, chewing on his roll-up. ‘She and your dad moving back to Rawton was a crazy idea, a romantic idea, for her to stay home and play mother, help your dad with his research ... She was just bored and frustrated and your father –’

‘And this meant you could paint her tits?’ Jake shoved his grandfather out of the way and the roll-up fell from his mouth. Bony bent down, scrabbling among the crap to find it. The old man looked so pathetic down there; pathetic and vulnerable. Who would care if the house went on fire anyway, who would care if he were to kick the stupid old sod to death?

‘Chrissie should have realised. He should have known that being here wouldn’t be enough for a girl like her ...’

‘Grampa, your painting my mum is nothing to do with Dad.’

Bony squinted up at him. His glasses were all skew-whiff and his teeth were long and brown like a horse’s. He was obviously trying hard not to cry. ‘Kid, the painting was nothing.’

‘Oh, piss off!’ Jake had heard and seen enough. He banged out of the room, down the stairs and out into the front drive where he stopped and let the rain pour down on his face and wash away the tears. He didn’t want to talk about the painting any more. He didn’t want to talk about his dad or to listen to his grandfather trying to pretend it was okay to be painting his daughter-in-law’s tits. He wanted to go home and for time to roll back to the morning before his mum’s death. The morning that he’d fucked everything.

MANUFACTORY INSPECTION AND COMMERCIAL RETURNS 10<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 1850

Elijah Thomas, Undercliff, Rawton Bridge

Cotton and worsted, manufacturers by power looms.

Mill 1822 and Dye works 1849.

Two steam engines, both 30 H.P.

96 time-workers

	male		female	
Under 10	-	-	7	1/6
10-12	5	2/6	10	2/6
-14	-	4/6	12	4/6
-16		6/	11	4/
-18	6	8/	14	5/6
-21		11/		6/
21	9	16/	22	6/

76 piece workers

68 time-workers

	male		female	
Under 10	-	-	1	1/6
10-12	1	2/9	2	2/9
-14	2	5/	1	4/6
-16	6	6/6	7	5/6
-18	6	9/	4	7/
-21	1	11/	5	7/6
21	19	17/	13	8/

Paid by workers: 12, mainly children

6 a.m. to 7.30 a.m, 9 hours Sat, machinery stops for ½ hour breakfast.

Children under 10 work 9 hours with 2 hours schooling at Flights Board School

1 hour dinner. Very little time in spring and autumn to use all daylight

4 full and 6 half holiday, no pay.

Corporal punishment not sanctioned; fining better.

A few children under 12 for throstle room, card room and spinning but Mr Thomas would prefer none under 10 years if older children could afford to work for those for the same price as under 10.

## Chris

Chris placed his spade carefully against a pew and gazed up at the plaque. No expense had been spared. It was made from marble, that speckled, pinkish variety beloved of monumental masons and kitchen designers. It protruded from the crumbling wall of Flaights Chapel by about twenty centimetres and took the form of an ornate window. Two marble scrolls were carved either side, while the top was fashioned into an Egyptian pediment bearing a sun disc sign. The gothic letters had been carved into the central polished window and gold-leafed. At the bottom, someone had placed a single child's glove on the jutting shelf like moulding. It was pink and woollen; about the size nine-year-old Eliza Donahue, pauper of the Parish of Liverpool and indentured slave, might have appreciated during the bitter winter of 1841.

He wiped the soil from his hands and kicked some mud from his boots. So much for Dr Ian Eldred of the University of Sheffield's paper, *Pauper burials in mid nineteenth century Yorkshire*, which stated that the poor were often buried in mass graves outside the boundary of consecrated ground. He'd gone carefully around the perimeter of the graveyard with his metal detector and spade and turned up nothing but the edge of a padlocked plastic box, no doubt bought from some hardware superstore in the last five years. He was covered in mud and wet through. In the damp air of the chapel his breath steamed. Everything smelled of mildew and decay; Undercliff Woods crept right up to the baptistery and leached all the light from the place. But at least his morning hadn't been a total washout. The Rawton Courier archives, stored on microfilm in the library, had yielded several interesting snippets of information.

Dredging through the records for 1851, he had discovered a short article of 15<sup>th</sup> August, detailing a complaint made by a worker employed by one of Thomas's rival mills: 'A Mr John Brierley, Spinner of Lye's worsted works. Brierley had contacted the newspaper, expressing 'grave worriment regarding Miss Eliza Donahue, late of Undercliff Mill who has been missing for three months.' When it was put to him that Miss Donahue was one of the apprentices released from indenture in June, he became agitated and told The Courier that the apprentices were 'never returned', rather that they had all

‘disappeared’ on 6<sup>th</sup> June, the Friday before Whitsuntide. He had planned to wed Miss Donahue on 7<sup>th</sup> June, when her indenture ended. The banns were put on display in Gibbetroyd Wesleyan Chapel four weeks beforehand. In July, he took the train to the Liverpool Workhouse at Brownlow Hill to make inquiries. There, he learned from the manservant of Donald Hargreaves, Governor of the Liverpool Board of Governors, that Miss Donahue and twenty-four other apprentices were reputed to have been ‘kept on’ at Undercliff Mill after the cessation of their indenture’.

There was no comment by the Courier on this strange story, despite it contradicting a longer article of 7th June entitled, ‘Returned to Liverpool Parish: Elijah’s Twenty-five ‘prentice girls’.

But there was stranger to come. During the first heady days of his PhD research, Chris had come across another article: ‘Rawton Mill-owner to embark upon “Grand Tour”’. Dated 20<sup>th</sup> May 1851, it announced that Elijah Thomas and his daughter were setting off to travel around Europe on 2nd June and they would be away for three months. Chris had even tracked down Thomas and his daughter’s name on the passenger ship lists for *The Swan*, a schooner that sailed from Dover to Calais at six in the morning of June 2<sup>nd</sup>.

This, coupled with an entry in the leather-bound book of local police records, also stored at the library, had piqued his interest. In the ‘Constables’ Record’ for the year 1851, Constable Abel Greenbank wrote: ‘Early morning on 31st May, Mister John Brierley, Spinner of Lye’s Mill, apprehended for striking Mr Elijah Thomas after forcing his way into his home on Market Street.’

For the first time, Chris was amassing tangible evidence that the mill-girls’ disappearance was more than a clerical oversight: he had the original indenture documents that showed the girls were neither returned to Liverpool nor kept on at Undercliff on 6<sup>th</sup> June. There were also some questions to be answered: why did a poor worker from another mill, the man who later demanded to know what had happened to the indentured girls assault Elijah Thomas at his own home two days before he set sail; and what of his daughter?

Ever since first hearing the story of the disappearing girls, Chris had believed that the key to the mystery was at Undercliff, whether at the mill, the school or the chapel. The

land, some seven acres, was all owned by Thomas and the buildings had been erected by him around the time the girls vanished. The only other place was Thomas's house on Market Street which had since been demolished. Although he had known the chapel from boyhood, even recently attending Christingle services with Cathy and Jake, today, he was seeing it with new eyes.

Elijah's plaque was on the wall to the right of the 'Judas' window on the left side of the chapel. Although the stained glass was now dirty and cracked it still recognisably depicted the famous biblical character hunched over his pieces of silver.

The plaque read: *In memory of Elijah Thomas of Undercliffe, whose end was eminently peaceful. He is resting where no shadows fall. 1814-1891.* The gold lettering gleamed brightly, illuminated by the last light of the day filtering through the grimy windows opposite. The plaque was quite high up. He pulled a chair below it and climbed up, coming face to face with the relief carved into the plaque. It showed a mild, worried-looking man in late middle age. He touched the cold marble, traced the lettering with his fingers, felt the sharp nose on the effigy, the fleshy lips. Had Elijah ordered this plaque himself, or was it commissioned after his death by a town grateful for his philanthropy?

'He was a remarkable man.' The voice behind him was soft, but he nearly fell off the chair in shock.

Incredulous, Chris turned around. 'He could also have been a murderer!' He could just make out Reverend Peter Arkwright standing in the shadow of the huge marble pulpit that dominated the chancel.

The reverend tutted in disapproval. 'I don't think that can be true. He had a wonderful reputation. He paid for this chapel as well as the extension which housed the Sunday School.'

Chris nodded. 'And twenty-five of the young women he employed went missing without trace.' As a kid, he'd feared the reverend with his guilt-inducing homilies and accusing stare. He was an old man, now, thin and stooped, but he still spoke with the combative vigour he had used when instructing the Underbank School juniors back in the nineteen-seventies. He shuffled down the central aisle towards Chris. As of old he wore



his black cassock, though now he walked with a stick. It was difficult to see him at all in the gathering darkness.

‘We don’t know that, Christopher. All that remains is a testimony to his care for this town. I only wish we had someone like him around today.’ With a weary arm, he indicated the peeling walls of the chapel, the choir stairs, now unusable due to rotten floorboards.

Chris clambered down from the chair and approached him. ‘There are many contradictions, Reverend.’

The reverend made a sympathetic noise in the back of his throat. ‘I read about dear Cathy’s murder. That, surely is the contradiction that needs addressing.’

Chris looked up at Judas and his bag of loot. Barely any daylight seeped through the stained-glass windows. He would have to leave if he was going to get home before night. The steep road leading to Flaights remained unlit and with Undercliff Woods spilling onto the tarmac, it was easy to lose your way. It was amazing that the old reverend had stayed in this wild spot, his house to the right of the chapel, buttressing the graveyard behind.

Reverend Arkwright shook his head sadly. ‘I’ve known you all your life, Christopher. Watched you grow up and now I find you digging around in the churchyard on a filthy winter afternoon. What’s the matter?’

The chapel grew darker. Chris was aware only of the cold and the smell of damp and polish and wax, the creak of the old building settling into the hillside for the night. Then a shocking fluorescent light snapped on and he was forced to shade his eyes, pleading as he did so. ‘I don’t know what happened to Cathy. She was killed. She’s dead. I don’t *know* ...’ Despite the chill, he had grown warm; sweat beaded his brow.

‘She came here once, to talk to me.’ The reverend put his hand on Chris’s arm and squeezed. His grip was still powerful. He pulled Chris closer so that their heads were almost touching. ‘Two years ago. She was very angry.’

Chris pulled away, hefted his rucksack onto his shoulder and found that his hands were shaking. ‘What are you talking about?’

‘I reminded her of Matthew’s gospel: “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive *your* trespasses”.’

Chris gripped the back of a pew. The old man must be getting mixed up, muddling past and present. He was well over eighty, after all. Cathy hadn’t told him anything. She never believed in God or religion. Said it was all brainwashing, and anyway, why would she come here, to an old clergyman, and not to one of her friends? ‘I’m not talking about forgiveness, but justice,’ he began. ‘It is in the public interest to know what that so-called paragon of virtue did.’

The old man shook his head. *‘For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.’*

Chris paused, his hand on the door. Why did he feel as though he was ten years old again, in trouble for playing truant? For a moment, he rested his forehead against the oak, finding reassurance in its age and depth. He turned back. Reverend Arkwright was now just behind him and his aged face could have been hewn from the millstone grit upon which the chapel was built, so deep were the furrows in his brow, so dark the gulleys running between nose to chin.

‘Catherine was very upset and confused,’ the old man said. ‘But in time she would have forgiven you.’

‘I don’t know what you are talking about.’ Chris pushed open the chapel door and a rush of wind and sleety rain came at them. The trees beyond the gate swayed wildly, leaves skittered up the narrow lane. ‘I am trying to find the truth about the missing girls. It’s what Cathy wanted me to do!’

Chris blundered out into the blustery night as the reverend switched off the light and followed, locking the door with an ornate old key.

‘You can’t ignore what you did.’ Reverend Arkwright’s voice grated over the soughing of the trees. ‘You can try to forget or concentrate on other tasks, but it will always be there, gnawing at your conscience as it gnawed at hers.’

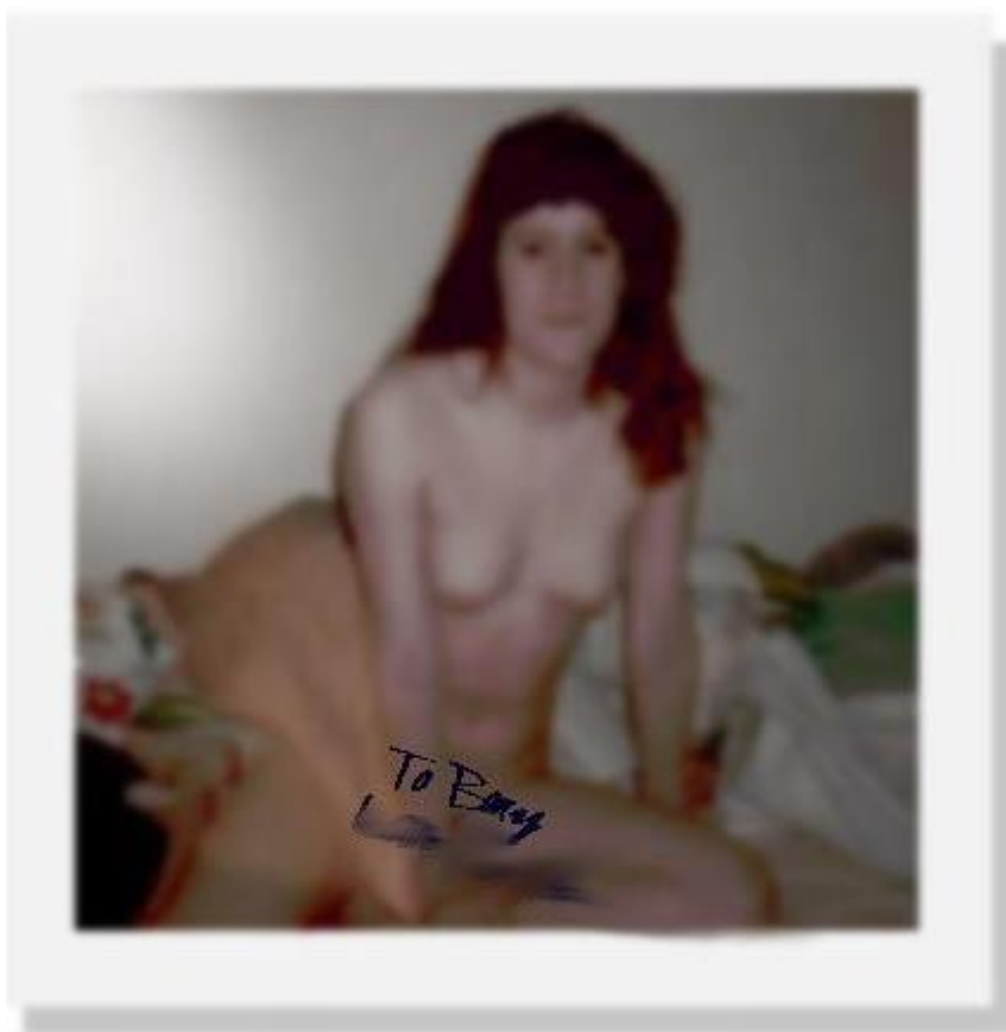
Chris watched the old man set his face against the weather and wondered how he retained such a staunch conviction of his own righteousness. ‘I am trying to solve an

ancient mystery!’ He hated the bleating tone of his words against the deep base of the storm.

‘You understand that I have to tell the police everything I know about Cathy?’ The reverend pointed to Chris’s spade. ‘And grave robbery is still illegal in this country.’

‘I wasn’t robbing ...’ Chris began but his words were carried away on the wind. The reverend waved a valedictory hand and turned away, towards his house. He wouldn’t listen anyway. His god would justify his decision; his god of forgiveness who let murderers go free.

Plate 12



## Bony

The studio looked dingy in the fading November light. Craggside was barely visible through a haze of mist and rain. No blackberry rocks now, no flash of golden millstone; only the grey, interminable grey of an impenetrable landscape. Bony sat down and began to skin up, narrowing his eyes to appraise the painting. It was overworked, dull and heavy, devoid of inspiration. He gazed at his artworks propped against the walls and saw them now as tableaux of remembered youth, vain depictions of another lifetime. On an easel in the corner leant a six-foot canvas depicting a girl named Ruby he'd met as an art student before Sylvia came into his life. She'd been with him for seven days, sleeping in his grotty flat in Hammersmith, before drifting off as people did in those days of so-called 'free love'. She'd pierced the canvas he'd been working on at the time with the stone from her belly button, a single ruby set into gold. He still had it somewhere, pinned into a mandala in the spare room. Why had he spent so long painting nude women when the landscape was calling him all along? He felt a lurch of shame that had nothing to do with Ruby and everything to do with the painting of Cathy. Why hadn't he destroyed that travesty of an image when he had the chance? He picked up a hog-hair brush from a table strewn with oil paints of varying age and provenance and moved to the Ruby canvas. His palette had been limited to flesh tones, soft ochre and umbers. The longer he looked at it, the more trivial it seemed. Ruby, what had she ever meant to him? He lit up a joint, took a deep toke and stared out of the window into the greyness. And what of Cathy; where was the karma? Once he'd believed in the balance of nature, the yin and the yang. He'd been so sure that the universe weighed its own justice, addressed the balance. But this wasn't true. Sylvia had left him, now Cathy was dead, yet he and Chrissie remained.

He squeezed out a blob of purple madder, streaked it with ochre and smeared it over Ruby's flesh. Then he took titanium white, so very white, gothic against the dark fire of the background. Jake was the real victim in this, he realised. The one to whom no balance, no natural justice had been shown. The boy had lost a mother and been cheated of a grandmother. Bony scrubbed his brush into the weave of the canvas. In paint, he began to conjure with the elements, summoning the landscape beyond his window. Here male

and female were in harmony: their energies equal. In the act of creation, he could avenge Cathy's murder, assuage his grandson's hurt and anger. He could forget Sylvia and Chris. He forgot himself. The colours blurred; only the brush remained in focus. His eye, trained to follow each mark, each line and stroke, looked inward and yet guided his hand. Cragside was obscured by encroaching night but it emerged through his brush, overlaying Ruby's summer tones with its wintry splendour, harsh and jagged against a turbulent sky. A work of magnitude grew. Another joint rolled, a sip of whisky from the flask he always kept filled. Hours passed.

'Grampa! Grampa, wake up. It's the police. Grampa?'

Daylight filtered into his view, the familiar smell of oil and turpentine. He smiled. The muse had come to him last night. Made herself flesh.

'Mr Adams? I'm DI Stephens. I'm investigating the murder of Cathy Adams. We are sorry to intrude like this, but we need to ask Jake a few questions, preferably with you present. My Colleague, Detective Sergeant Jones is here with me.' A young woman was peering anxiously into his face. She looked Tahitian, Polynesian, a Gauguin beauty to be bedecked with flowers. Another woman, hidden behind her grunted her greeting.

Jake shook his arm. 'Grampa? You've been asleep for hours.'

Bony blinked up at Jake and groped around his jacket for his tobacco tin. His mouth was parched, and his head throbbed. Rain pattered lightly on the glass roof of the studio.

The policewoman tried again. 'Mr Adams? Perhaps we could speak in another room, a room less –' She looked around as though words failed her. She wore a soft perfume, lily of the valley, he would have thought was old-fashioned now; such delicate fragrances belonged to the past. But here it was, most unexpectedly reminding him of Sylvia. Sometimes the randomness of the universe tugged at him in ways he couldn't fathom. He eased himself out of the chair and stretched. 'Follow me.'

In the lounge, Bony sat with his back to the window, gazing in at the motionless scene in the room. Jake was sitting stiffly on the sofa, the subdued light softening his tense features. The Gauguin beauty was standing opposite while her colleague, an older woman, was ensconced by the baize covered card table, in the Lloyd Loom chair whose

woven frame had trapped the dust of ages. She was frowning down at a notebook. They resembled Van Eyck figures, static yet primed as the Arnolfini Marriage.

The beautiful Rachel spoke first. ‘Jake, as I explained, we have a few questions for you.’ Her tone was encouraging, tentative. ‘Is that okay?’

Jake nodded stiffly.

‘You were excluded from school last term for threatening a teacher.’ The other officer butted in.

‘Is this true, son?’ Bony asked. It was the first he’d heard of it, but then, why would anyone tell him? Cathy hadn’t spoken to him since she and Chris had split, never kept him informed of his grandson’s school record. Jake stared at the carpet between his feet.

Jones was evidently not one for small-talk. She flicked to the right page of her notepad and cleared her throat. ‘Jake threatened Miss Doyle – his English teacher. She had asked him to stay behind after a lesson because she wanted to talk to him about a poor homework essay and he – I quote here from Miss Doyle’s testimony: “banged his fist on the desk and called me a stuck-up bitch. Then he pulled the homework book from my hands and threw it to the floor. He said that if I didn’t stop picking on him he would *have* me”. Later that day, a penknife was confiscated from him. ’”

‘Jeez.’ Bony looked sadly at the boy. This was not the Jake he knew.

‘So?’ Jake set his chin defiantly. No doubt he thought he looked hard, but instead it made him seem even younger.

Jones paused, perhaps waiting for him to say more. When he didn’t, she carried on. ‘I spoke to the head of your year who said that your behaviour has become “difficult” over recent months. He said you were “erratic” and “unpredictable”. Of course, the school was aware of your parents’ separation; it was in the papers and your mother had been in to discuss her concerns with your form teacher, Mrs Botterill. She was worried that you weren’t handling it too well. Do you think your mother was right?’ Her tone was not unsympathetic and Bony warmed to her. She was in her fifties, by his reckoning, someone who had seen some life.

Jake didn’t move. Bony sat down beside him and put his hand on his shoulders, patting encouragingly. ‘Come on, son. Tell them what they need to know.’

‘Were you struggling to cope with your parents’ separation, Jake?’ Jones asked again.

‘He also assaulted another pupil,’ Rachel said, almost apologetically. ‘A boy two years younger than himself –’

‘That’s right.’ Jones peered into her notebook. ‘There was a dispute concerning prepaid lunch vouchers. The boy – Adam Hawkins in Year Eight – claimed that Jake was stealing these vouchers from himself and other children. Threatening them with violence if they wouldn’t surrender them. Jake was in Year 11 at the time. The vouchers are used as currency within the school for all manner of things – from money to drugs. In this case, the assault was witnessed but the allegation over the vouchers never proved. Have you anything to say about that now, Jake?’

Again, Jake shrugged and Bony wished he could hold him, sooth all the fear and conflict away. Whatever the kid had done, it was over now. There was no need to interrogate him like this just three days after he found his mother murdered. Bony looked up at the policewomen. ‘Jeez, can’t you leave off him? It must have been a big change when his mum and dad split up. Hard on him, and –’

‘Parents separate all the time, and it doesn’t mean the children become violent.’ The beauty’s voice held no sympathy and her face was set hard.

Bony felt Jake’s shoulder’s tense as he stood up and began to make for the door. He turned back, and his face was flushed, his body all angles. ‘Instead of asking me all this stuff from ages ago, why don’t you find whoever murdered my mum?’

‘Jake, Jake, chill out, can’t you,’ Bony attempted to reach his grandson but the Gauguin woman was standing between them, a solid wall of authority he could not breach. She’d caught hold of the boy, stopping him mid-escape; the taut sinews on her arm stood out as she restrained him. Bony closed his eyes and breathed deeply, willing the scene to end.

‘You used violence against younger children; did you hurt your mother as well?’ Jones asked quietly.

Jake struggled to break free. Bony rose and caught his hand, trying to swallow down the awful suspicion that his only grandchild was being accused of murder. ‘Jeez kid, you didn’t ...? The rain had started again, drumming on the glass roof of the studio in the next



room. Everything was in slow motion, the noise and the way the kid pulled himself away from the detective. Bony raked his memory. Had Jake shown signs of aggression in the past? He'd been such a quiet, cute kid.

'Jake?' Jones's voice was sharp. 'Were you ever violent towards your mother?'

Jake turned around and stared into Bony's eyes. His expression was oddly blank. 'Of course not,' he said quietly. 'But Grampa painted a nude picture of her. If you're looking for suspects, then there's your main one. It's obvious what he wanted from my mum.'

For a moment all was still, save the ticking of the old clock in the corner, then turmoil. Stephen asked to see the painting, which was now just inside the studio door, waiting for a whitewash. Jake slipped away from her to the door, Jones made a move to follow. But Stephens stopped her.

'He'll turn up.' Stephens held the painting of Cathy up to the light and sounded as though she couldn't care less. 'Interesting subject, Mr Adams.'

His mouth was dry. If he could only skin up a nice big joint and offer it around. Maybe then they would understand. 'It was an experiment. It didn't work.' He laughed in what he hoped was a carefree way. 'Should have painted over the damned thing, really.'

'So, she was your model – Cathy?' He glanced up at Stephens. She'd make a good model herself with that dark hair, the beautiful skin; not that he was interested in the human figure any more, that time was past. Now the land was all he needed, vistas of memory and imagination. 'No, man.' He sat down on the sofa again. The rugs had all slipped down from the back into an uncomfortable bunching under his knees. 'She worked for me, that's all.'

Stephens put the painting face down on the sofa, no doubt finding the nudity offensive. She stared down at him with her cat's eyes. 'We'll take it in, if you don't mind.' Her voice was chilly. Maybe she was one of those feminist types he'd come across before. Women who thought men had no right to even look at them, who thought the viewer voyeuristic.

'I didn't kill Cathy,' he said quickly, sure she was going to ask. 'I thought the world of her.'

‘All the same, it could be evidence.’

‘Of what?’ His hands were shaking, and he had an urge to sit on them. These bossy women had shifted their interest from Jake to him all because of the stupid painting. Jones was now standing beside Stephens presenting a unified wall of authority. Jeez, did they really think he had murdered his own daughter-in-law?

‘Sometimes, the whole family dynamic is worth close scrutiny,’ Rachel said evenly. ‘We’ll look after it, don’t worry.’

‘I don’t want the damned picture!’ He half rose, desperate for them to believe him. ‘You can have it, incinerate it!’ Outside a rook cawed in sympathy. The long window was punctuated with raindrops, turned into amber in the streetlight. All he had been through, Sylvie going, Chris’s troubles and he was under suspicion.

‘We wouldn’t dream of destroying it, Mr Adams. A painting by the great Bony Adams!’ There was a hint of amusement in Jones’s rounded vowels, though her face was a set as ever. ‘It’s probably worth a bob or two, eh?’

‘Tell me about Christopher,’ Stephens cut in.

‘Chrissie?’ Bony’s attention was caught by the meagre light from the window illuminating the line of her cheekbone. What to say. How to convey the terror that his damaged son wouldn’t survive, through school, to adulthood, through his life; that at any moment he could be overwhelmed. It was up to him, as his father, to remain vigilant, and prepared for when he began to fail. Deep down, Bony knew that there was something unformed about Chrissie; he had been stunted, crippled by his mother’s abandonment, so that the world and all its pleasures and pains was too much for him. ‘He’s like his mother. Sensitive. He always struggled with people. Cathy was good for him. She was his public face. She would brave the world for him, when he would rather hide indoors. He was never the same after his mother left ... He went off to University, but things didn’t work out at first ... When Cathy came on the scene, he changed, brightened up. She gave him courage.’

Stephens had looked confused. She had written none of this down. ‘Courage?’

‘She showed him that he could do it: work, enjoy life. Make friends.’ The young Cathy’s face swam into his mind: Cathy laughing, her face bright with fun. She arrived

with the colours of spring, yellows and reds, greens and pinks. She shone. ‘She was like a firefly, lighting the dark, showing him the way.’

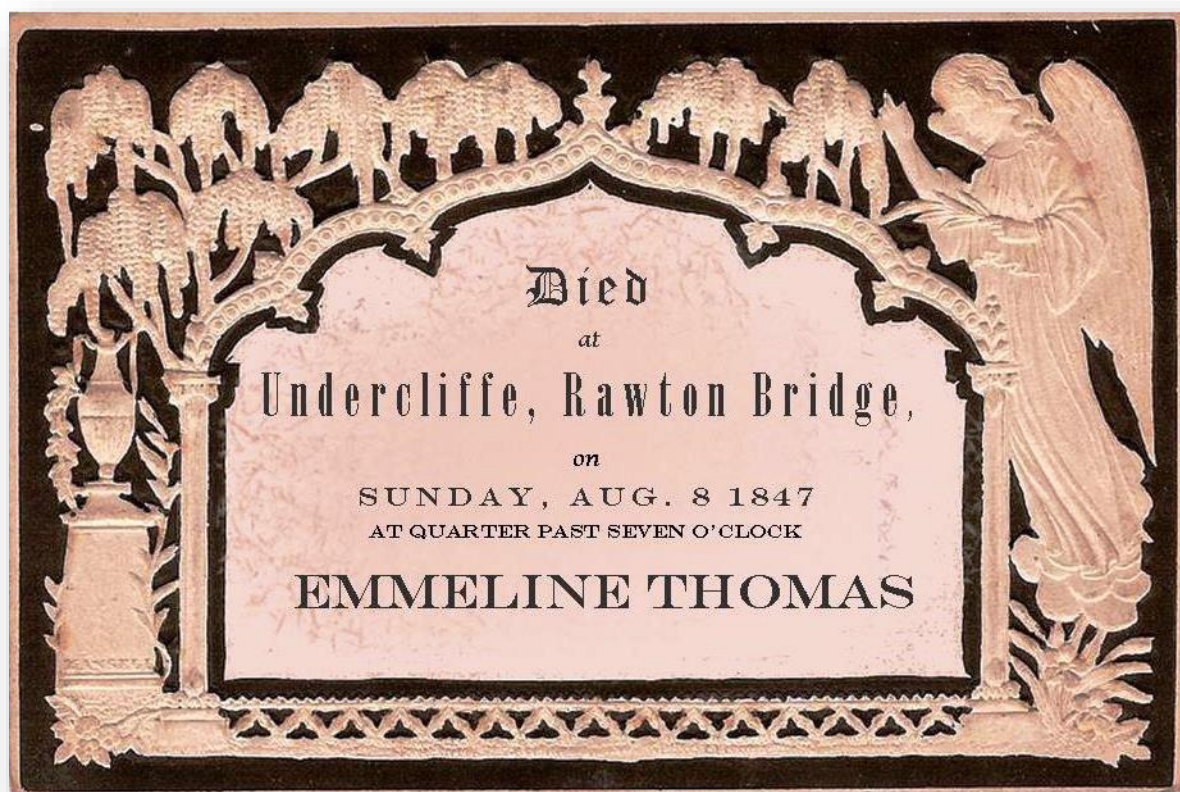
‘So, you must have been upset, then, when they split?’

Bony nodded but avoided the detective’s dark eyes. ‘These things happen, though, don’t they?’

Stephens seemed about to ask him more but thought better of it.

‘Okay, we’ll be seeing you again, I am sure. In the meantime, if there is anything at all that you can think of to help the investigation, then please get in touch. And if Jake turns up, you can let him know the same.’ She handed him two of her cards, one for him, one for Jake. *Detective Inspector Rachel Stephens.*

Jones picked up the painting and, keeping it turned towards her thigh, made for the door. He felt a sudden regret as he watched them leave the house, braving the dark, the rain and wind and the muddy pitted driveway to their car. He hated losing any of his paintings, even this one, he wished he’d never begun. They were so much a part of his life. A piece of his history had been removed; it might never be returned in the same condition and somehow his past would have changed forever. He stood at the front door, his eyes growing accustomed to the darkness, long after the policewomen had gone. Like the landscape, nothing was fixed; memories could be redrawn, colours could be altered. In the end, his own life might become unrecognisable to himself.



*Funeral Card in pink and black with modified text [card] private collection, Halifax*

**Jake**

*You know that I am here for you.*

Jake sheltered under a tree and stared down at the stark words. This was all wrong. Impossible; Mum texting him now. Three days ago, he had seen her dead body, her blood rusting up the bedclothes. Her body was so cold. Who else said this to him, who else could it be? ‘You know that I am here for you’. Only Mum. It was something she’d say every now and then. It had been their secret code, when he was small, kept even from his dad. The message was sent from her phone. He brushed the wet hair from his eyes. Water dripped down his back. He should have put a coat on, not run out on those police like that. He was probably in trouble. They’d have cars out looking for him and all sorts. And he’d totally pissed off Grampa for telling them about the painting. But he couldn’t just ignore it. A painting like that of *Mum*! And to find it now when she had been killed; it was like being kicked again and again in the same place.

He looked around, unsure of where he was. After leaving Bony’s he had walked and walked, not caring about the rain or which direction, just wanting to get away from the stupid questions and the pointless raking up of stuff from ages ago. So what if he’d threatened that silly old cow, Miss Doyle with her *now, now* and *you just listen to me, young man*; it wasn’t like he would ever have actually hit her or anything. He had to get away from the police and the creeping feeling that his mum’s death was all his fault. But now he couldn’t see anything but the narrow road ahead. The pale glow from his phone did little to penetrate the thick darkness. Occasionally a car went past, momentarily lighting the road, forcing him into the bushes at the side, and spraying water all over his vintage Queen tee-shirt. The cloth now clung wetly to his body. He’d have to dry off soon or he would catch flu or something. Who was that message from? Was someone messing with his phone, with his head? His feet were soaked in his thin Converse trainers, but he began to walk again. If anyone knew where his mum’s phone was, it was the woman who’d been in her bed on the last night of her life.

He had no idea when Mum started seeing Alex. She’d been around forever, but it was always hard to keep up with the people his mother knew. There was an agent in London,

and then other people from the publisher's. There were Sue and Alison, old friends from her Burnside uni days in Leeds who sometimes rang and loads of fans or people she met on her book tours or when she did talks. He had to write down everyone who called on a pad next to the phone and there was always a new name. But Alex, she was different. With her Mum would drink red wine and sit up into the night talking about books and horses and laughing, always laughing. Mum was always quite serious with his dad but with Alex, she would giggle and make jokes, she would mess with her hair and act like she was out on a date, which, of course, she was, even when Dad was still living there. When they went out, she would ditch her usual black jeans and old jumper and wear dresses and skirts, red lipstick. It had made him mad, especially when Dad moved out. It was okay in school to talk about being gay and not being prejudiced but when it came to your own mother . . . And even though he'd been secretly glad when Dad went to live in the flat, he'd wished it wasn't because Mum had turned rug muncher.

Mum had tried to explain. Even on that last morning, she had tried to make him understand. 'Things are going right for me!' she had shouted. 'For the first time in years, I am truly happy. Can't you allow me that?' He felt sick at the memory. If he'd said, 'yes', if he'd said, 'of course, it's fine. I'm pleased for you', would she still be alive now?

Alex Wadsworth's farm was out of town, up a cobbled track on the east of the valley. It was flanked by a small huddle of cottages facing a railway embankment. Even in daylight, the farmhouse was almost blocked from view by a dense screen of dark evergreens; now, at close to seven on a winter's evening, it was difficult to make out the track. He waded through mud and god knows what, little stones stabbing into his soles, his ankles twisting in the many potholes. There wasn't a single item of his clothing that wasn't drenched. Again, he swore at himself for his stupidity. His coat had been right by the door at Grampa's. He'd walked past it to escape. Still, he could see lights on in the house now and they guided him up the track. As he drew nearer he was aware of animals in their stables around the cobbled yard. Horses eating their hay, something grunted, a dog whimpered in its sleep. The rain, though, was merciless. He squeezed out his hair. He was doing this for Mum, he reminded himself. To prove it wasn't him but someone else

who'd murdered her. His phone vibrated in his hand. Another Facebook message. 'Our angel of hope has gone to the other side.' He thrust it in his pocket in disgust. These people, who the hell were they? Just people who'd read her book, who thought they knew her enough to spew out all their sickly emotions onto social media.

The front porch was lit by a single yellow bulb. He pressed on the doorbell and held his breath. What the fuck was he going to say to Alex? He hadn't seen her properly for months, not since his mum's birthday in July when she'd come over and openly kissed her in the kitchen right in front of him. She had given Mum a photograph, he remembered, a sepia brown photo of an old lady in a weird hat, that was obviously some kind of in-joke between the two of them as Mum had laughed and said, 'you remembered' in a delighted way and they had danced around the kitchen to some old song that was on the radio. Was Alex Wadsworth a murderer? And if she was, was he putting himself in danger by coming here? He had no idea whether the police had questioned her after he told them about her, but he wanted to hear her excuses for himself. He heard her coming to the door and almost lost his bottle. Perhaps this was a bad idea after all. Perhaps she'd be mad at him, tell him to go to hell. Should he just run down the track back to Grampa's? The bolts slid back on the door and he steeled himself.

Nothing could have prepared him for the change in her. The woman who looked out at him from her glass porch had dirty, straggly hair, longer than he remembered. She wore an old stained blue dressing gown and her fingers, as she brought them up to remove the cigarette smouldering at the corner of her lips, were stained with nicotine. He had never even known that she smoked. It was her eyes that shocked him most, though. Usually a bright, flashing blue, they were dead, dull and cold. She looked about twenty years older. She stared at him for a moment, as though she was trying to work out who he was.

'Jake, what are you doing here?' What could he say? Why was he here, shivering and dripping rain onto the tiles of her porch? 'Don't stand there letting the cold in. You'd better come inside.' Her voice was sad and tired, blending with the dreary splatting of rain on the pitched roof of her porch. She turned and shuffled back into the house, leaving him to kick off his sodden trainers and edge around some shelves where a couple of

miserable geraniums were still trying to bloom against the odds. He squeezed out the ends of his shirt sleeves into one of the pots before following her into the house.

Alex sat on a leather chair in her living room where a single low wattage lamp hardly did anything to brighten the gloom. The place stank of old roll-ups. Dirty plates lay among the books on the floor, crisp packets and chocolate wrappers. This room was separated from a back room by some sliding glass doors, through which he could see the kitchen, a dining table and chairs. Books about horses were everywhere: they teetered in piles on bookcases, spilled onto chairs. He had to edge around the room, his heart hammering, to find somewhere to stand.

‘Have a seat,’ she said. ‘Sorry about the state of the place. I’m having a clear out.’

He trembled, unable to answer. He knew only this ache inside his chest, this roar when he thought of his mum lying on the bed when he’d found her; it made his stomach churn and his head thump. It had to be mended somehow, or he would slowly crack open like some fissure in the earth. His thin crust would break, exposing his raw, molten inner core. Then there would be no hope for him.

‘I just want to know ...’ he whispered. This was no good. He wanted to confront her, to shout and accuse her, to make her listen.

Alex relit her cigarette and squinted up at him. ‘Know what?’

He sat down, helplessly. ‘What happened.’ The trembling increased. It had started in his legs, then his hands, now it took over his whole body, as though someone was holding him by the shoulders and shaking him violently. He was so cold.

‘Oh, great!’ she said. ‘You come here to blub your eyes out.’ She stood up, grabbed a tea-towel from the back of a chair and held it out to him. ‘Here, you’re wet through. Dry yourself down.’

‘I’m sorry, I’m not ...’ He took the tea-towel and attempted to stem the flow from his eyes.

‘Then you go up to the bathroom; you’ll find some old jeans in the linen cupboard there – and a dry shirt. You’ll catch your death if you stay in those things.’

He could only obey. The jeans were a little weird, shape-wise; Levi’s that had seen better days, but they were clean and felt a whole lot better than his own. The shirt was



made of some soft fleecy stuff that warmed him instantly. He dried his face on a towel, surprised to find it scented with lavender.

When he came down, Alex was in the kitchen, stooped over the kettle. She glanced up and gave a half smile. 'So, now I shall make you some coffee – or perhaps hot chocolate?' He had forgotten her voice, how gentle it was, the kind of voice you'd use when stroking a cat.

'I don't know why I came,' he blurted. 'It's like my legs walked here on their own.'

She flicked on the kettle and paused for a moment, looking at him from under her long eyelids. A pang of shame made him turn away. He had never been exactly welcoming to her in the past. He'd been deliberately rude when she visited his mum; leaving the room when she came in, snorting when she spoke. Now, hurt was dulling her eyes. There was no reason she should bother with him at all, never mind make him hot chocolate. Unless, of course, she had a guilty conscience.

'One thing we agree on.' She poured hot water into a mug and the steam blew up around her face. 'We both want to know who killed your mother.'

'You were there, the last night, in her bed.' He gazed hopelessly around the kitchen. 'The last person to see her alive ...'

'No, Jake, I wasn't.' She turned and handed him the drink, keeping her eyes averted from his. 'One of the horses had been out of sorts. I left in the early hours to check on him. *You* were the last one ...'

His cheeks burned. Did she know? Had Mum phoned and told her about the row?

'Look, Jake.' She sat down on a high stool at the breakfast bar that divided the room in two. 'You told the police about me – I had to go to the station yesterday and they asked me a load of questions. I don't blame you. You'd like to think that I, your mother's big butch mate, was the one to do it, but you would be wrong. Totally wrong.'

He sat down opposite her as directed and took a sip of his drink. The warm sweetness sapped his anger and suspicion. 'Then who?'

She gazed at him dispassionately. 'You need to look closer to home.' The accusation was so unexpected that the chocolate slopped out of his mug onto the dark wood of the bar.

‘I could never stand him. Creeping around like some beaten up dog. He wouldn’t even look me in the eye! He preyed on your mother and when she finally saw through him, he couldn’t cope.’ She flexed her hands, held out in front of her. The fingers were gnarled and old, big baggy knuckles, yellow nails clipped short.

Jake took another swig of chocolate. ‘Who are you talking about?’

‘Look at the facts: he met your mother when she was, what, eighteen, nineteen, when she’d just lost her parents. She was attractive and vulnerable: a well-off, grief-stricken young woman, alone in the world. He turned up and suddenly she was giving up her place at university and shacking up with him.’

‘You mean *Dad*?’ The cold that the dry clothes and hot drink had dispelled now returned. He thought back to the stories Dad had told him. Of the first time he and Mum had met in the university bar when she’d drunk too much ‘Pernod’ on a two-for-one offer and fallen into his arms. Or his proposing to her on a train trip to Rawton Bridge to visit Bony.

But Alex was just getting started: ‘He encouraged her to pack in her place at uni, though made sure he finished his own degree. Then he dragged her away from Leeds, away from all her friends and family, to Rawton Bridge because he’d been offered some tin-pot tutor job at Rawton College. He isolated her ...’ Alex stood and placed her hands on the breakfast bar between them. When Jake didn’t respond, her voice grew louder. ‘The first time I ran into your mum was at the Women’s Centre in Gibbetroyd!’

‘What’s the Women’s Centre?’ Jake put the drink down on the bar, thinking of everything Dad had told him about Alex being one of those psycho man-hating feminist types. Nothing she’d said had changed his mind.

‘I used to volunteer there. It was set up to improve the quality of women’s lives.’ Alex sat down, her face flushed and animated, almost young. ‘Some of the women who use it have suffered domestic abuse ...’

‘What do you mean *domestic* abuse? Dad never hit her!’ Jake blinked fast, his hands curling into fists as he remembered the PSHCE lesson last year when some woman came in to talk about being slapped about by her idiot of a husband. Dad never even raised his voice.

‘Not all bruises are on the outside, Jake. Your mum could have had a career for herself, years ago, instead of kowtowing to Chris’s whims. She told me everything. Even though she dropped out of university, she still got a decent job working with a marketing company in Leeds. She’d just been promoted when they moved to Rawton and, of course, it was too far to travel into the city every day and Chris convinced her that she should help him with the research work ... Then you were born and that put paid to everything.’

Jake swallowed. It had been a mistake, coming here. Dad was right, Alex was just jealous that Mum had ever been married. ‘Dad never forced her to do anything,’ he said, calmly. ‘How could he, anyway, when he was ill? And Mum had a job, she wrote that book, earned lots of money. Dad was the one stuck at home, isolated.’

Alex gave a deep sigh and turned her back on him to stare out of the window into the darkness of the yard. ‘Can’t you see that was just what he wanted? *She* earned the money, owned the house. He stayed home pottering about with his so-called research. And when she got fed up of bankrolling him and asked him to leave –’

‘But Dad *did* have a job ... It wasn’t his fault he got made redundant. And he did look after me ...’ Jake swigged down the rest of his rapidly cooling chocolate and put the mug on the breakfast bar. This conversation was pointless. Alex obviously hated his dad as much as he hated her.

Alex turned around angrily. ‘When your father wasn’t having a nervous breakdown or threatening suicide, he worked *two* evenings a week – less than six hours – and that was only in term time. They lived off the money your mum inherited; her parents were pretty wealthy. Two houses in the UK and a place in France. I bet you never knew that, did you? Chris made sure all the assets were liquidated early on.’

Jake stared at her. He had never questioned why his father didn’t go to work full-time like other people’s dads. He’d never really considered where the money came from, though Mum did talk of her idyllic childhood sometimes, of holidays in France and the bedroom she had. Even before *On Angels’ Wings* came out, he had known that his family were richer than other people’s. Their house was nicer and there was never really any talk of money.

‘If you want my opinion on who killed your mother, then I don’t think anyone needs to look further than your father,’ she concluded, her voice now shaking.

It was time to go. This whole visit had been a mistake. He would never get any sense out of Alex.

‘And, just for the record, I wasn’t in your mother’s bed that night and I never have been!’

Jake turned back, uncertain. Alex’s face, in the grim kitchen light was a mask, all shadows and beaky nose. She looked jaundiced against the white tiles behind, like a patient just released from hospital after a long illness. Her voice was calmer when she spoke again.

‘She was a friend, that’s all. Our relationship was never about sex. In fact, if you really want to know, your mum was initially interested in me because of my family history. We go way back, and she thought it might be useful for your Dad’s research –’

‘But Dad said ...’ That terrible scene came back to him. A hot sticky day, thunder in the air. He’d just got in from school and Dad, all pale and strung out was in the kitchen asking him to sit, that he had something to tell him. They’d gone through to the living room with a tin of beer each and then came the announcement: ‘I am leaving because your mother has become a lesbian.’ His father had broken down in tears, collapsed down onto the sofa, sobbing loudly. ‘I’ve got to go,’ he’d said, ‘I’d rather be homeless than endure this betrayal.’ Jake tried to comfort him but all the time he was thinking what the kids at school would say and how he would get the piss taken out of him ...

‘Whatever your father said was garbage! Your mother booted your father out and not before time. She hadn’t been happy for years. He had no money of his own, so she paid him to go. It was the only way she could get the useless parasite off her back. And, just in case you believe his ridiculous notion: she wasn’t a lesbian, she hadn’t met someone else, she just realised that she had undersold herself for years and decided to do something about it.’

Jake closed his eyes, willing the tears away. His limbs heavy with a sudden tiredness. With every word Alex spoke, the less he understood his father. He wasn’t sure how much more he could bear. His phone buzzed in his pocket, he pulled it out, glad of any diversion

until he realised that it was another '*You know that I am here for you*' text. He stared at Alex. He'd been so sure the messages were from her, that she had taken his mother's phone. But that was impossible. She was before him now, not a mobile in sight.

'What's the matter?' She indicated the phone.

'The reason why I came here. You were the only person to get close enough to take her mobile. I thought –' In silence he showed her the text.

Her face drained of any colour. 'You thought me capable of sending you a message from your mother's phone after she'd been murdered?'

He shrugged, no longer believing anything of the sort. 'Mum's phone sent it and I reckoned it must've been either you or whoever it was k ... killed her.'

'What does it mean *I am here for you*?'

'Mum always said that to me.'

Alex took a very deep breath, and, for the first time, her grey eyes met his own. 'This is serious, Jake. Have you told the police?'

'No ... No, not yet.'

'You should have handed it in right away. The person who sent the message could ditch the sim any moment. '

He flushed. The truth was that he didn't want to hand over his phone, to give away the only bit of his mother that still belonged to him.

'I'll come with you, if you like. To the police.'

'Why?' he demanded, suspicious suddenly.

'I want her killer to be brought to justice, Jake, just like you. I am not the enemy.' She wiped her eyes, brushed the hair from her face. 'I'm one of the good guys in this whole sordid story. Please believe me.'

Plate 14



Chris

‘I hope for your sake that you are telling the truth.’ DI Stephens protected Chris’s head as he climbed into the car, hiding him from public outrage. ‘The reverend was most upset at what you were doing up at Flaights Chapel.’

It was just after seven and not yet light; the rain had turned wintry. A woman stood smoking in the doorway of Rawton Working Men’s Club opposite the police station; she was skinny, prematurely aged. This was the oldest part of town, the street that journalists didn’t mention in their articles on *inclusive Rawton*; it lacked the handmade, stage-set feel of Market Street. Here, litter collected in the gutter, paint peeled, graffiti adorned the walls. Chris hunched down in the car behind DI Stephens and her colleague, Detective Sergeant Jones, and wished they’d given him the chance to get changed. His trousers were encrusted with mud, now flaking off onto the seats; his cagoule was still damp and his gloves, stuffed into the pockets, were not fit to be worn. To be dragged out of his flat so early was an indignity. Why had the Reverend Arkwright called the police? He’d been researching, that was all.

‘Okay, take us up to where you have been digging then,’ the DI commanded. ‘The exact spot, I mean.’

‘Behind the churchyard,’ he said. They turned into Market Street and past the town square where people on their way to work were slipping on the newly laid cobble-stones. The tatty old sandstone cenotaph with its smoke-blackened roll-call of the dead had been taken away last year and replaced with a gleaming stainless-steel sculpture of a knife used in the finishing of fustian, the product for which the town, and Elijah Thomson’s manufactory, had once been famed. Ignoring the great holes in the tarmac that in places revealed the original eighteenth-century cobbles, they raced towards Blackstone Road, making Chris feel queasy, then began the steep ascent up Chapel Lane towards Flaights.

Even in daylight, the building was forbidding. Ashlar stone cladding was no doubt all the fashion when Wesley was parading around the countryside looking for sinners, but now, weathered to moss-streaked black, it resembled a Palladian mausoleum. The woodland behind made the place all the more oppressive, the dark scaly trunks seeming to absorb any available light. A black van was already parked up outside the chapel and Stephens

waved to the people inside. 'Let's get this done,' she said, holding the door open for Chris to get out of the car. 'Show us where you were last night.'

'I told you. I was looking for the mill girls' grave,' he muttered, pulling his hood up. The sleet was vicious. 'In the church inventory of 1878, there is a reference to a 'paupers' internment' of 1852. But I think I am wasting my time. I only found –'

'Show me.' Stephens allowed him to go forward, around the church wall, as he had the previous night. Using it as his guide, he found the place where he thought he had been digging; it all looked very different in the daytime.

He peered at the ground for any sign of disturbance but saw only fallen leaves and lumpy roots, chunks of wood and rocks. Then he spotted a rotting bunch of flowers, lying half buried in damp leaves, a pink raffia bow just visible. Wire in the bow around them had set his metal detector off yesterday.

'Where do you want us?' Two men in white protective overalls, carrying picks and shovels, had followed.

Stephens looked at Chris. He shrugged. 'It was getting dark last night and I only found rubbish. Plastic and stuff.'

The man went forward and photographed the flowers, taking care to record their exact position. Stephens snapped on some surgical gloves and bent to retrieve them. 'No message,' she said calmly. 'Nothing to indicate who they are from.'

'Might have got lost,' Jones put in. 'What do you think, Christopher. Do you think there was a message?'

He shrugged helplessly. This was stupid. Pointless and irrelevant. The flowers were modern, nothing to do with the missing girls; certainly nothing to do with him. 'I don't know,' he said, detesting the whine in his voice. 'I couldn't see last night. I just found them and some kind of plastic box, somewhere around here. Nothing. Rubbish.'

DI Stephens nodded at the two men. 'Better begin. And make it quick. I'm bloody freezing. I don't suppose that anything will be too deeply buried.'

'You can go sit in the car, Ma'am? We'll let you know if anything turns up.'

She shook her head and joined Chris beside the wall. 'No. We'll wait, won't we, Christopher. See what they find. Interesting for you, isn't it, as a historian?'



Chris's teeth began to chatter. Was she taking the piss, now?

The men began to dig, tentatively at first, and then with more gusto, tossing aside lumps of earth and piles of leaves. The wind swirled around them; Flaights was over two hundred and thirty metres above sea level and here the sleet was quickly turning to snow, powdering the ground and the branches, covering the mud with Christmas card sparkle. The DI's face was sombre, immobile. She watched every move the men made.

'Do you not think,' Jones said in a stage whisper, jerking her head towards Chris. 'That he might be right. That this is all a waste of time. What are you expecting to find?'

'I don't know,' DI Stephens admitted. 'But Cathy Adams has been dead three days and this is the only lead we have.'

It didn't take long before they found the plastic box. One of the men thrust in his spade and it hit the stone that was wedging it in, a little more digging and the whole thing was uncovered. It was one of those cheap, under the bed storage boxes you could buy in discount stores. Again, everything stopped for photographs.

'This what you found?' DI Stephens said it as though the notion of his finding the box was somehow ridiculous.

He nodded. 'Yes. I told you. Just rubbish.'

'If you want us to get it up, we'll have to shift that big stone,' one of the diggers said, clanging his spade against a rock. 'Whoever put this down here didn't want it disturbed. It's wedged.'

'Whatever it takes,' the DI said, and turned away from the men, back to Chris. 'And you, if there is anything you want to say now, while you are not under oath, about Cathy's murder or any other murder, then I would get on with it.'

He shook his head and watched the men digging and brushing and photographing. 'I don't know why you think that my research is anything to do with my wife being murdered.'

'She would have soon been your ex-wife, Mr Adams. She filed for divorce four weeks before her death, remember.'

He stamped his feet, the wound of that letter opening afresh. His canvas shoes were sodden and he could barely feel his toes. Yes, he had received the solicitor's letter all

right, but he hadn't intended to do anything about it. It was filed in the bin like the letters that came after it, pleading him to take notice. If Detective Inspector Stephens thought that by mentioning his divorce she would shock him into some kind of false confession – okay I bumped her off, it's a fair cop, guv – then she was sadly deluded.

The men were scraping away at the big stone, their spades crunching against it, the clangs curiously deadened by leaves and earth in which it had been sunk. It was about ten centimetres thick, a huge oblong slab. Suddenly Chris's heart began to pump a little faster. Carved letters were visible on its upper face, the same gothic script that could be found on most of the gravestones in the churchyard. This was not some cheap memorial. Despite the snow, coming down thick and fast now, he could make out the expensively bevelled edges, the quality of the carving. Whoever had cut this was as accomplished as the stonemason who'd carved Thomas's plaque. One of the men levered it up with his spade, the other looped a rope about it and heaved. Slowly, it began to rise, emerging from the ground like some ancient monolith. He rushed forward.

'Stand back!' the DI commanded, and before he knew what was happening, Jones had grabbed him from behind, pulled his arm painfully up his back.

'Please, I think this is a sign that the mill girls ...' He struggled but was helpless against her grip. A flurry of snow obliterated everything for a moment, sticking to his face and eyes and making him blink rapidly. 'Let me just see the inscrip –'

'Back!' Jones yelled in his ear and she pulled him roughly back to the wall. The stone, upright and well over a meter high, made an imposing monument. It swayed for a moment on its end before swinging over and landing flat.

'Get the box,' DI Stephens said. 'And put a move on before we all end up with hypothermia.'

A few more photos were taken and with the aid of some carefully knotted rope, the box was lifted slowly from the ground. It was shallower than Chris had imagined, and the plastic was semi-transparent so that the dark contents could be seen through the sides. He was beginning to shiver quite violently now. His wet footwear and thin plastic coat were no protection against this kind of cold. It was bloody snowing, for God's sake and the DI didn't even have a coat, only that mourning suit; but nothing touched her.

Now the box was on the ground and she was standing over it as the camera flashed. ‘What do you reckon, Christopher?’ she shouted over to him in a manner that could be confused with friendliness. ‘This what you were looking for last night?’

He remained silent. What was the point in replying when she had obviously made her mind up that he’d been doing something dodgy? One of the men handed her a face mask, which she snapped on with practiced ease. Chris strained in Jones’s grasp. If only he could take a peek at the big stone before the snow covered it.

‘Move back, Chief, if you please. We may need to secure the site,’ one of the men in overalls said. Obediently, Stephens moved a little way off and watched intently as the lid was prised away. The wind moaning through the trees and the patter of snow falling on leaves were the only sounds. The lid was placed on some black plastic and the contents of the box investigated with implements that were extracted from their own sealed packets. Moments passed and then one of the men looked up from his task. ‘Chief, you need to see this. Looks to me like . . . .’ he inserted a thin tube of metal into the box and hooked out a coloured plastic object: a child’s rattle in the shape of a yellow and blue train.

‘I knew it!’ DI Stephens shot a humourless grin at Chris. ‘I bloody knew it.’

‘There’s at least a jaw bone intact. It’s been there a while but it’s a child, a very young child,’ the man replied. ‘I’d suggest you cordon the area off now.’

She did not look into the box again, instead she walked right up to Chris. ‘You see, I get a feeling about things,’ she said. ‘You smell of death. Now I know why.’ Chris turned away. None of this was anything to do with him. But she moved closer, so close that he could smell the mint on her breath, see the snow dusting her hairline like dandruff. Her lips were within kissing distance; he noticed the lipstick was wearing off. ‘You told me you were looking for bones.’

He moved away. ‘Bones of young women who died nearly two-hundred years ago –

‘And now look what we’ve found.’

Chris looked up into the trees, at the splintered gaps of white sky between the branches. The snow was falling now like lumps of ash, covering everything. 'Am I under arrest?' he asked without moving.

She smiled in response. 'I think we need another chat, don't we, about what we have found here? Come on, back to the car. Robbie, Jim, get the area taped off. Jones, go ask the vicar what he knows.'

As Chris turned to follow her back to the car, he risked a quick look at the headstone. In elegantly carved, blackened letters were the words: 'IN MEMORY OF ORPHANS EMPLOYED .... But snow had obliterated the rest of the wording, the names listed. Without scraping it away, he could see no more.

Plate 15

# The Best Place to live in Britain?

*Lifestyle*

What makes Rawton Bridge so popular?

Alice Thorpe reports from a town that is enjoying a renaissance .



Blink and you'd miss it. Rawton Bridge, voted 'Britain's best place to live' in 2015, is a tiny town nestled in the heart of the Pennines. A small former mill town, once centre of the region's worsted industry, it is now known for its arty crafty inclusivity, its numerous restaurants and bars and the ever growing popularity of its arts and culture festival in June. Rawton is like Brighton with cobbles

and brown Yorkshire stone. Its independent clothes shops, art galleries and bookshops give it a Camden feel, whereas the predominance of healing centres (including ear candling, Crystal reflexology and Hopi massage) suggest the more esoteric atmosphere of Tintagel. In short there is something for everyone here.

With the outsourcing of textiles to the east, the area fell into rapid decline in the middle decades of the twentieth century – there are tales of weaver's cottages selling



Cathy Adams moved in Rawton Bridge in 1998

for the price of a pint – and the town could have all but disappeared off the map. But impoverished students, hippies and the flotsam and jetsam of sixties Britain counter-culture began to arrive, attracted by the cheap housing, beautiful Pennine countryside and legends of 'otherness' that the area has spawned since time immemorial. They did up the town in their own inimitable fashion, replacing boarded up greengrocers' with rainbow cafes, taking over derelict mills for

art studios and writing rooms and appropriating redundant non conformist chapels as theatres, galleries and, in one case, as the headquarters of a witch's coven. It wasn't long before the house prices began to reflect this new popularity and now, one of those pint -of-beer-priced cottages is on the market for a almost £300,000.

Famous sons and daughters of Rawton include: Sir Elijah Thomas, philanthropist and politician, 1814-1891, Dame Harriet Greenhead, actor 1922-1986 and the biologist and geneticist, Paul Callum Whittaker 1934-2006. Artist Bony Adams and daughter-in-law,

## Bony

The woman at his door could have stepped straight out of a Modigliani painting: her face was a perfect pale oval framed by straight, dark hair, eyes black ellipses, mouth a scarlet curve. She was dressed in a coat of deep red, a stark contrast to the rain drenched umbers and olives of his driveway. It was just after ten and the day was only just getting going.

‘Coldwater House sounds like Cold Comfort Farm.’ She held out her hand. ‘I’m Sam Fountain. We spoke on the phone yesterday.’

Bony nodded. Yesterday had mutated into a vivid dream. After Jake ran away and the painting of Cathy was removed by the police, his brief conversation about art history with Sam had felt like lucid wish fulfilment. He could barely remember what she had said or anything they arranged. Now, here was Sam in the flesh, all scarlet and black, fresh from London and sitting in his studio, providing a human distraction from the horrors of Cathy’s murder and his guilt over Chrissie. He brewed rooibos tea while in a voice that was almost mechanical in its attention to detail, she told him what she wanted.

‘Vasari included both the personal and the public in his *Vite*. Because of Vasari we know that Michelangelo bickered with the Pope of the time because His Holiness owed him cash for some marble; also, that Paulo Uccello failed to turn up to finish painting a cloister of San Miniato because the Abbott gave him only cheese to eat. I want to know about *your* work, but also details of your life – the things that make you unique. My idea is to provide a window into the lives of the best artists working at the moment – something that future generations can access in the way we can access the artists of the Renaissance through the *Vite*.’ She hadn’t taken off her coat, which ballooned over the sofa, hiding her body so that he had no idea whether she was fat or thin. It was difficult to figure out her age as she was painted like a geisha, the skin a matt ivory, eyes ringed in kohl. Her accent was neutral, and like so many of the younger generation, inflected with a transatlantic earnestness. She was a constructed thing, he realised, built of clothes and makeup and posing as the Vasari of the twenty-first century. Maybe she was an artist, too, in her own way. He sniffed, resisting the temptation to wipe his nose on the back of his sleeve as usual. The humdinger he’d smoked earlier was making him fanciful.

‘So, why me?’ he asked, drawing up a wooden seat. ‘There are so many in my generation – from the pop artists through to the Brit lot of the 1980s. Blake, Hodgkin ... Plenty of old men still daubing away ...’

She leaned forward, suddenly seeming a whole lot younger. What was she, late twenties, thirties? Her makeup and the black gloves she still wore covered any tell-tale signs. ‘I chose you because you started out in the Pop era, but after your early explorations of commercial images, quickly returned to more traditional subjects ...’ She looked down at her lap, and in the shift of shadow on her face, he realised she was letting her guard down. ‘I’ve been interested in your work for years. I saved up to buy a copy of *Flare* when I was only fifteen. I love the way you use the –’

‘The book that has graced many a coffee table but never been read.’ Bony grinned shamefacedly but she carried on:

‘That was when I realised that I was going to be an art historian. The wall of my bedroom was covered in the prints of your 1960s paintings, ‘Modern Motherhood’ and ‘Daddy’s Sauce’. I kept scrapbooks and pictures about you. And I hoped to meet you one day.’ She was staring at him with such an intensity he felt embarrassed. He’d been something of a name, back in the day, but it was years since anyone had looked at him like that.

‘Jeez.’ He fumbled in the pocket of his shorts for his tobacco tin and realised he’d left it in the kitchen earlier. ‘I’m flattered.’

‘Your work in the seventies – the change to oil and watercolour from acrylic and multimedia, those canvasses depicting women in interiors – inspired a whole new generation of artists, people like Paulo Valetta, Alexander Schmidt. And then you seemed to retire, though I see you are still working with landscape ...’ She looked up at the drama of Cragside emerging from the *Ruby* canvas. ‘I am interested in your personal journey. Does the work reflect what is going on in your private life, or is it a separate entity? I’ve already videoed Lankey, you know, the guerrilla artist? And Alistair Darke, last year’s Turner winner. Amy Cameron, too. She did that piece at the National for the hundredth anniversary of the outbreak of the first world war. What strikes me about all the artists I’ve met so far is the way in which their art doesn’t just mirror but *becomes* their life –’

‘I’m years older than them!’ He stood up, suddenly desperate for a joint. This keenness was as oppressive as it was gratifying.

She also rose, and he realised that she was holding a video camera, though it was not yet turned on. ‘This is to be a snapshot video of artists *now*, at this moment in history. Age is not the issue –’

‘Isn’t it?’ He laughed. ‘Another year or so and I might have gone up to that great love-in in the sky.’

Her eyes flashed. ‘Mr Adams –’

‘Bony, please!’

‘– it is important that you are represented in this work. What you do with paint and canvas may remain for eternity, but your story will not ... It is the *story* I want, not the work!’

He sighed. She had sure picked a cruel time to explore his story, with Cathy on a mortuary slab, his son going doolally and his grandson on the run from the police. Would all of this affect the painting of Cragside; what trauma was loaded onto his brush and laid into the work along with the linseed oil and pigment? If this was the case then his earlier painting must include traces of Sylvie’s abandonment of him, his despair over Chrissie. His women in interiors had begun around the time Sylvie left. People liked them and some of the images were made into greeting cards, they suited the seventies fashion for self-exploration. They were said to be haunting, those women with their doe eyes and bony hands, helplessly confined, their skin bluish, as though they had never been near the sun. He had not intended them to be Sylvie. He had tried not to think of where she might be and who she might be with as he worked, but he supposed it was inevitable that her likeness would creep into his work. Was this what Sam was after? It was all very well, mentioning Vasari and all those youngsters from London, but what did she want from him, gossip, his real life laid bare?

Sam moved to the window near the window now, staring out at the pile of wood, off-cuts of canvas stretchers, banked up against the wall of the house. He joined her. The garden was now dusted with white; the sky, leaden grey, tinged with aubergine. ‘And I



can hardly believe I am here after all this time. You can't imagine how I have longed to meet you.'

For the first time since hearing of Cathy's death, Bony felt a surge of optimism. That this young woman should find his work so inspiring was surely a sign that there was still some good in the world. He turned to her and touched her arm, lightly. 'Don't worry about the snow. There's plenty of room if you need to stay over. Now, what do you want to know?'

## Bony Adams at The Sphere, Manchester

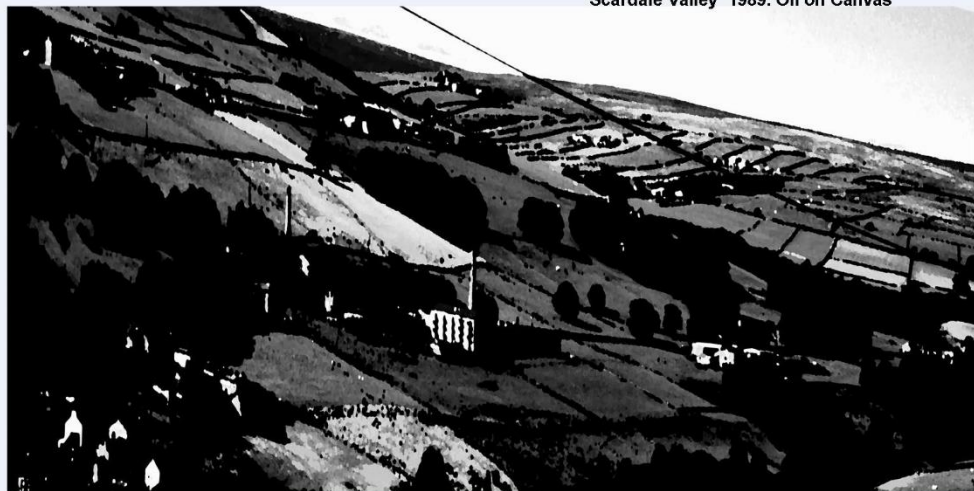
Humphrey Lyde

Unlike Bony Adams' previous exhibitions in which one was always sure to find something buttock-clenchingly risqué, his new work, showing at the White Space Gallery in Manchester is, well, something you could take your Granny to see. What's more, she would probably say something like 'that's nice, dear'. She might even want one to replace the Tretchikoff Green Lady over the fireplace. So, what has happened to Adams, the enfant, teenager and now middle-aged *terrible* of Pop? Whatever happened to the sex and drugs, the revolutionary spirit of his earlier paintings? Adams' new work is bland enough for a

corporate dining room, inoffensive enough for a hospital treatment room. It's the kind of stuff you might see reproduced on greeting cards! Is it that Adams has grown old and tame? Did he shoot his bolt with all those nudes in interiors back in the 1970s or is there something else going on?

Adams' landscapes are topsy turvy creations in which one feels the world sliding away from beneath one's feet. They lurch into the horizon propelling the viewer with them. The lines are mucked up, perspective is all wrong, the viewer is subject to a dizzying roller-coaster of

Scardale Valley 1989. Oil on Canvas



## Jake

It was late afternoon. The gritters were out and the school had sent out warnings that it might close early. Jake and Maddie waited for the 598 in the bus stop outside school on the busy Gibbetroyd road. The 'Opportunities' Fair had been a disaster. No one wanted to come to school on a Saturday to talk about universities or apprenticeships as it was. The snow meant that hardly anyone had turned up. Jake had only made the effort as Maddie would be there. It wasn't as though he was that arsed about uni any more. That had been his mum's big ambition for him. Sleety rain hammered on the Perspex roof of the shelter, lacquered the tarmac with a sickly shine. Juggernauts thundered by, creating small tidal waves; the world continued about its business. As Jake watched Maddie checking out the bus timetables, he wondered whether he dared ask her out.

'It's late,' she said, coughing and wafted away his cigarette smoke. 'Do you have to? There are four hundred chemicals in cigarettes, you know, a load of them cause cancer *and* you're blowing them right in my face.'

'Sorry.' Jake quickly stubbed out his roll-up as the bus doors flew open. He paid the driver for both tickets and made his way to the back of the bus. He had been so sure about Alex but the visit to her place had changed all that. The stuff she'd said about his dad made him feel weird and scared and kind of pukey. The bus drove along the valley bottom. Each side of the main road the hillsides rose steeply, in places the dark slopes had been colonised by naked trees, in others they'd been cleared for stubby houses built from stone. Even at the height of summer, there was a dankness to the place, a kind of claustrophobia. As soon as he could, he'd be out of here. Off to Leeds or Manchester or further afield. Away from his freakin family.

'Anyway, how are you ... You know, since your Mum? I can't imagine how you must feel.' Maddie said, her voice unbearably tender. Jake closed his mind to her words, he didn't want to think about his mum. Not here, not on the way back home. '

He had no intension of moving back in. He needed some things, school books and clothes, his laptop and his only decent pair of trainers; the black brogues Grampa lent him had put blisters on all his toes. But he didn't want to go alone. He knew he couldn't take

his dad. Fuck, what a mess that would be. Not that he had a clue where he was anyway. He'd phoned and phoned his flat but there was no reply.

'So, have you decided what you're going to do next year when we leave?' he asked to divert the attention away from his mother. 'I guess uni would be a way of getting out of this shithole, though I would rather go travelling for a while first before thinking about more studying—'

'Lucky you to have the option.' Maddie looked past him, up to the tops of the moors where reservoirs lay as churning pools of opaque grey, reflecting the sky. 'Not sure. Mum and Dad worry I'm going to end up with a mortgage of debt just to get a qualification no one is interested in. I may as well cut out the middle man and go work in Billy Bear's Burgers in town when I leave school.'

The note of bitterness in her voice disturbed him. 'Maddie!' 'You can't just go work at that old perv's. You're dead clever; you came top of that science project last year. You can't just —'

'Leave it!' Maddie turned to face him, her eyes steely. 'It's okay for you. Your mum earns a fortune. You probably won't even need a student loan. My dad got made redundant from the council last week. He reckons that's it for him. He's fifty-six. No one will want —' she stopped and shook her head.

'My mum's dead,' he said, quietly. He picked at the edge of a pink poster advertising the Rawton Bridge Pride March from the back of the seat in front. 'She's dead.'

'Oh, shit, Jake, I'm sorry.' Maddie touched his hand lightly, sending an electric shock through the hairs on his arm. 'I didn't mean —'

'Yeah, yeah. I know.' He stared out at another boarded up pub set into the rock of the hillside. The bus dipped down further into the valley, into Rawton Bridge. The darkness of the place seeped into him. Fuck, why had his Dad come back to this shithole? He'd escaped, hadn't he, got to the city, a degree under his belt, a wife? What was the lure of the place for his parents? the old stone buildings leaned into the road, bowed by the continual rain, There the windows were small and mean, the town was full of pointless shops, selling crappy ornaments or arty pottery; endless coffee shops and restaurants, catering for the fussiest allergy suffering vegans.

‘Jake, your phone,’ Maddie said, gently. He’d barely been aware of it buzzing in his top pocket; he hadn’t even realised his phone was on. He should have handed it into the police by now, reported the use of his mother’s number. As he reached for it, the bus lurched to a standstill.

‘Time to get off.’ Maddie brushed his hand, her fingertips chilled. They’d stopped by the Co-op, the only useful shop in the whole high street. Even that was sandwiched between an organic wholefood shop and a white painted building in which, according to the rain blistered sign, you could get crystal healing, shiatsu massage and aura therapy. He followed Maddie meekly off the bus; the phone and whoever was using it, could wait.

Maddie’s hand, steadying his arm as though he was old or mad, got him up Lye’s hill. It was a steep climb. When the local bus came by, they had to flatten themselves against the high walls, built to contain hillside gardens from spilling into the road. Brown sleet spattered their legs. The home he had shared with his mother was right on the tops: an old farmstead nestled into the moorland as though it had grown there. Its sheltered position, on the lea side of the valley, in its own protected hollow, had enabled her to indulge her passion for gardening. Pots of colourful winter pansies and violets she had planted less than a month ago, to ‘brighten things up’ were blooming in her memory. He felt a terrible need, on behalf of the house, to roar, to make a sound so loud and hollow it would be heard across the valley.

‘I’ve only got the key for the back,’ he said shakily. Me and Mum, we never use – used – the front.’

‘All right.’ Maddie pushed down the latch on the back gate. ‘We’ll go round there, then. You okay?’

He nodded, hardly able to see. His heart drummed in his ears, just as the icy rain drummed on the hood of his mac. He was sick and dizzy. The last time he had made this journey, days ago, everything had been okay. No, it had not been okay, far from it. Just took him two entire hours to realise that his mother’s mutilated body was lying up there in the bedroom. Two hours of drinking and ... Jesus. He couldn’t go in.

They were at the back door now. He stared at the step where two chalk marks, crosses, had been drawn like a warning of disease within. There was more tape on the door. It

was hanging free as though someone had cut the ribbon in an opening ceremony and left it there, dangling, soaked.

‘The key.’ Maddie reminded, and he pulled it out of his pocket. His hand was shaking so much he couldn’t get it anywhere near the lock. Sweat dripped into his eyes. Why was he so hot?

‘Do you want me to...?’ Maddie’s hand stroked his wrist and he allowed the key, greasy with the sweat of his palms, to drop. She caught it and gripped his hand. ‘You want to go through with this? You don’t have to, you know. Not if it’s too soon. We can just turn around and go back into town. No worries.’

Jake forced himself to concentrate, though his mind kept loading up with the very picture he didn’t want to see. All he had to do was go in, grab some clothes and stuff then get out of there. He didn’t need to enter his mum’s room, he didn’t need to see anything. Maddie turned the key and the lock clicked. The door swung open with a corny horror film creak. Shit, he was going to be sick. He swallowed and gripped the wall. No way. No way was he going to vom all over the most fit girl in Year twelve; the only person who’d been kind enough to offer to come here with him.

Maddie was standing in the kitchen. The branches outside made playful shadows on her beautiful face so that she became transformed; into an underwater creature, a sea nymph or mermaid luring him away from his duty, his grief.

He took a deep breath, the tension suddenly dispersing. This was just his house, the house he’d grown up in. Here was the kitchen, same as ever, though there were footprints on the tiles and the surfaces were littered with paper coffee cups and pizza boxes. And here the lounge in its stuffy night gloom, with the curtains still closed. This was tidier, though post-it notes were stuck like ticker tape around the TV and DVD player. His mother’s computer had gone from the corner as had her pile of box files, one of several that teetered in every room. But the old CDs were still there, the photos on the bookshelves – all except the one which had been used in the newspapers, of his mother receiving some prize for *On Angels’ Wings*. A weird chemical smell hung in the air. He guessed it was something the forensics team had used. There was nothing too different, nothing to be afraid of. He walked back into the kitchen, opened the fridge door and

pulled out a couple of cans of cider. Mum wouldn't be needing these any more. He felt strangely relieved when Maddie took one and yanked the ring pull. The snap and fizz broke the silence.

'Let's just fetch your stuff and go.' Maddie's voice was quietly assertive. 'We can drink the cider outside, on the way down to town.'

Jake marched through into the living room and pulled open the door to the hall and stairs. There was no stalling now. He looked up the stairs which seemed steeper and darker. The patterned carpet runner was tricking his eyes. It swirled and bounced dangerously as he watched. What the hell was happening?

'You'll be all right, just take it slowly. One at a time.' Maddie sounded as though she was talking to a child. Still holding her can, she pushed him forward, propelling him up each step. Once they reached the landing, the reason for the gloom became apparent. His mother's door and the window above, which usually allowed daylight to filter through from the window in her bedroom, was all sealed off. A swathe of black plastic covered door and window.

Jake's body was rigid. The black plastic was close enough for him to touch without stretching his arm to its full extent.

'Is this ... is this where it happened?' Maddie whispered.

'Yes.' His was a croak.

'Let's go ... to your room.' She reached out and put her hands on his shoulders, slowly turning him around to face his own room, and her. He looked down and saw that her eyes were full of tears; her red mouth was trembling and moist. He felt transformed, surreal. He bent down and placed his mouth over hers. He grabbed her chin, jerked her face up to him and pulled her close. She tasted of cider and chewing gum as he edged his tongue into her mouth, allowed it to roam about those neat white teeth. His eyes he kept open, even when hers had closed. Her body pushed towards his own, melding into him.

She pulled away. 'Jake, where's your room?'

He stumbled across the landing. They made it to the bathroom, and then fell upon each other again, leaning against the doorframe, his shoulder caught at an awkward angle so the edge of it dug in painfully. His mind raced. Was this *it*? Was he about to do what

most of the lads he knew only ever dreamed of? His eyes were watering, watery, like an old person's, like Grampa Bony's. Was he crying? He couldn't tell. This was really going to happen! She was pressing, pressing him, the force of it almost violent. His lips dragged across her auburn hair, tugged at the sweet smell of her scalp: shampoo and school and a musky scent all of her own.

'Have you ...?' he asked, pulling away from that sweet mouth. She had become so much older than him, so accomplished.

She shook her head. He followed as she spiralled out of his grasp and began to open doors: the guest room that no one ever stayed in except Dad, the towel cupboard, and at last, at the brightest part of the house, his own room. 'Here?'

His breath caught in his chest at the sight of it. The duvet was gone, so was the pillow, the sheet and mattress cover. His laptop was not where he had left it, on his desk by the window. The rug had been kicked aside exposing the floorboards beneath, a few old swap cards and shredded bits of quadratic equation from Year Eight. All the drawers had been rummaged through. His clothes were hanging out. Only the empty can of cider was where he had left it, that night he had been getting to grips with Ten Guitar Songs for Beginners. It waited on the windowsill, its last drops evaporating. He pulled out of Maddie's grasp, frantic suddenly.

'Where is all my stuff?'

'The police will have it,' Maddie whispered, not realising now that everything had changed. 'But don't worry –'

'My laptop!' He raged around the room, sweeping surfaces bare. Last term's footie kit, stinking in a carrier bag, his dressing gown, piles of old papers and books, a pair of slippers in the shape of dog's heads his dad had bought one Christmas. Lethal things, they had nearly killed him as he tried to walk downstairs with his headphones on. His foot had slipped beneath him and he went tumbling down the stairs, towards the front door. He remembered thinking: this is it, now, the end. This is how I will end.

But his mother had been there, breaking his fall at the bottom of the stairs, and bending back her own little finger in the process. She had needed to wear a bandage for days.



Jake stopped, frightened. The tears came exploding out of him, shocking in their violence.

‘Jake, it’s okay, it’s okay,’ Maddie was with him, stroking his hair, holding his head against her shoulder. ‘Let’s get out of here, yeah? It’s too soon, there’s nothing here anyway. You can buy new stuff. A new laptop. I’ll come with you, yeah? We can choose, or you could go online and buy one ...’ He was only dimly aware of the desperation in her voice, the rising intonation on the word, ‘yeah’, a word designed to staunch the flow of his grief. He knew that he needed to be on his own, to sort out what had happened in his own head, but he also knew that Maddie could bring him a kind of comfort. And sex. Though not here, like this. Not now.

Like a biddable dog, he allowed her to pat him calm, then followed her around the room. She pulled items of clothes from drawers, clothes that must have belonged to him as they were in his room but he no longer recognised or remembered. Clothes that were too small, too young or just too weird to contemplate. She assembled a small pile of stuff on the stripped bed: two pairs of tatty jeans, a couple of tee-shirts, pants and socks. Most of his clothes had gone.

‘What would they want with my stuff, Maddie?’ he asked, as they closed the back door.

She leaned her head on his shoulder as he locked up. ‘I dunno. Evidence, I guess. Ruling you out. Fingerprints and you know, DNA. That’s what they look for.’

They walked down the drive, shakily, arm in arm. Jake hadn’t realised how rigid his shoulders and jaw had been, braced against all he might feel. Now he relaxed enough for his eyes to leak piteously. He clung gratefully to Maddie, but she didn’t seem to mind or notice this new flood of tears. As they reached the gate, she stopped and pointed to his pocket in a matter of fact way. His phone bleeped another message.

‘Probably only Gino or Cleveland or one of them,’ he said hopefully, but as he swiped the screen, he knew. His most frequent text correspondent had sent him a message.

‘Jake?’

He was trembling so badly the words would hardly form themselves in his mind. ‘I... It’s another of those messages.’

Before he could stop her, Maddie had grabbed his phone and was staring down at the screen. She read: ““If I give you to the black wolf/ for a whole year he’ll keep you. / If I give you to the white wolf/ for a long time, he’ll keep you ... Ninna, Nanna, ninna, no”. What the hell?’

He looked at the message, stuck on the end of a conversation that had ended days ago. Despite the chill wind, the sleety rain, he felt uncomfortably warm. Who else but his mum even knew of the Ninna Nanna song she had sung to him every night as a child?

	<b>Miller</b> @millerzone	Nov 27 2013	Luv the book. Elias and Donatella are fantastic. Great that she is his equal.
	<b>CathyAdams</b> @CathyAdamsBooks		Thanks, Miller
	<b>Miller</b> @millerzone	Dec 4 2013	Wud us send me a signed photo?
	<b>CathyAdams</b> @CathyAdamsBooks		If you PM me your address.
	<b>Miller</b> @millerzone	Jan 18 2014	Thanks for the pix. Saw your interview in The Bookseller. Nice hair color. Like Donatella's. L'Oreal #Babylon 6.66
	<b>Miller</b> @millerzone	Apr 24	You never wrote the book so why are you getting all the money?
	<b>CathyAdams</b> @CathyAdamsBooks		What do you mean?
	<b>Miller</b> @millerzone		Husband did all the work, bitch. I've seen stuff on his website. Victorian millgirls going missing – wot your book is about. Admit it. Your just a loser.
	<b>Miller</b> @millerzone		'The heartless treatment of pauper apprentices often resulted in their premature death.' Christopher wrote that, you talentless bitch.
	<b>CathyAdams</b> @CathyAdamsBooks	Apr 26	Please stop sending these messages.
	<b>Miller</b> @millerzone	Apr 26	Only when you fess up to being a plajarist lying cow.
	<b>Miller</b> @millerzone	Oct 31st	Christopher gave you everything and you replay him by nicking hi swork.
	<b>CathyAdams</b> @CathyAdamsBooks	Nov 3rd	Please stop this
	<b>SixWives</b> @Henry8		Great book, Cathy.
	<b>CathyAdams</b> @CathyAdamsBooks	Nov 5th	Thanks, SixWives. Are you a Mormon?
	<b>Miller</b> @millerzone		Jake is cute.
	<b>CathyAdams</b> @CathyAdamsBooks		Are you threatening me?
	<b>Miller</b> @millerzone		Just a little
	<b>CathyAdams</b> @CathyAdamsBooks		I will take this thread down and call the police if you contact me again.
	<b>Miller</b> @millerzone		He loves it when yur angry

## Chris

It was starting to feel familiar, this dingy little interview room with the water cooler and the warnings against bad behaviour plastered on the wall. There was a young copper in now, couldn't be more than twenty-two, bum fluff on his upper lip, standing to attention at the door like a beefeater outside the Tower of London. What did they think he was going to do, make a run for it while the DI was out of the room?

He nibbled the skin around the nail of his thumb. At least they'd let him change out of his filthy clothes. He'd got home so late last night that he'd fallen asleep in front of the TV. The paper suit he'd been given wasn't much more comfortable, but it was dry and clean, and a big old radiator was warming the place up nicely. Good job, although the temperature had lifted, it was still raining hard and the day was descending into night. He took a sip of machine-made coffee and grimaced. Even with three sugars, it was bitter, the colour of ginger biscuits. He would happily have stayed, chilled to the bone up at Flaights, if he could have a proper look at that big headstone. Was it some kind of marker for the mill girls' graves? Had he been wrong all these years and they had died of natural causes?

'Mr Adams.' DI Stephens swept into the room, hair gleaming in the strip light fluorescence. Her dark suit was dry and immaculately pressed and he wondered when she'd found the time to groom herself. Jones carefully placed a sheaf of paper on the desk, then flicked on the recorder and announced their presence. 'I just want a few more words and then we can all have some lunch.'

'Are you going to charge me?' Chris asked, biting the dirt from under his right thumbnail. He wasn't sure any more what he was supposed to have done – killed the child in the plastic box, killed his wife: both?

DI Stephens treated him to a rare smile. 'You were arrested for unauthorised digging in a graveyard. Now, we don't know what happened to the poor little thing in the box, yet. Not till the pathologist gets back to us, anyway. And it seems the child has been there some time. You insist that you had no prior knowledge of the burial but the fact remains: it is unlawful to move or disturb human remains without lawful authority.' She

fixed him with her curious green-brown eyes. ‘Now, we *know* your wife was murdered.’ She moved some of Jones’ papers to expose a battered copy of Cathy’s book, *On Angels’ Wings*. It was the fourth edition. The cover bore the image of a Victorian grave, a stone angel bearing down. Cathy had hated it. He took another quick gulp of bitter coffee and stared at the table. It was made of cheap formica, bashed at the edges, to expose the chipboard underneath. Stephens’ perfect nails clawed Cathy’s book, almost stroking it. The recorder hummed softly, awaiting the news.

‘Some evidence has come to light,’ the DI added, almost as an afterthought. ‘We thought that you should be the first to know. Some red fibres. Quite distinctive. We’ve tracked down the manufacturers, everything. They used this particular fabric for quite a few clothes in their range last spring.’

He waited for the pronouncement that the fibres were from his clothes but it didn’t come. The DI, instead, took some papers from the bundle on the desk and studied them for several minutes during which he grew hot with anxiety. Eventually, she sighed and looked up. ‘We’ve had the technical team go through Cathy’s hard drive.’ Again, that waiting, the tense silence; maybe he was supposed to jump up and shout, ‘oh no!’ or something. As if he didn’t know what was on Cathy’s computer.

Jones blew her nose loudly. Chris looked beyond his inquisitors to the copper on guard, the light switch on the wall near his ear that was slightly out of alignment with the doorframe. Five degrees, he reckoned, if that. Maybe three. He’d enjoyed geometry at school, all those angles and bisections. Maybe he should have done Maths rather than History. Truths revealed mathematically were empirical, eminently provable, whereas history lent itself to distortion and lies.

‘And we’ve had a look through your laptop. It seems that you and Cathy worked very closely together. She does, of course acknowledge you here.’

He kept his eyes on the light switch although he knew she was showing him the page. He knew the words by heart: Thanks to my darling husband, without whom none of this would be possible.

The DI showed the dedication to Jones who sniffed dismissively. ‘And there is something else here, too. Some part of the dedication, in Italian, which, of course, works with the theme of the book nicely. Have you any idea what your wife meant by this?’

There was no need for him to look at the book. “A nessuno lo darò”. It had been her idea of a joke. Thumb in mouth, he sought the nail with his tongue, caught a ragged piece of the flesh between his teeth and ripped, peeling off in a long strip. He tasted blood but couldn’t stop. ‘Ex-wife,’ he muttered tapping his left heel on the floor so that his knee bumped against the underside of the desk. He couldn’t look up, wouldn’t. ‘And I don’t speak Italian.’

‘I would be curious, though, if I was you. After all, you are a historian, aren’t you, used to looking things up, researching, decoding . . .’ Her voice dropped in tone. It was gentle, kind. ‘And it’s your name there. Cathy was writing to you.’

‘So?’ He stared fixedly at her fingers on the desk, her slim, tapering fingers with the shining, manicured nails. The room was hot now, too hot. He bit down hard on the edge of the thumbnail and a chunk of nail came away in a satisfying arc. The words were burned into his memory; a lullaby his mother used to sing, passed down from her Italian mother.

‘I will keep you for myself,’ DI Stephens said quietly. ‘I checked it out. Easy enough to paste into a browser.’

‘It was just a joke, an in-joke.’

‘This is my own copy of *Angels’ Wings*.’ The DI placed it again on the table and sat back in her chair. ‘One of my favourite novels. I don’t usually keep paperbacks once I’ve read them, but this had me hooked from the start. I even went to see Cathy read at Waterstones in –’

‘I don’t understand what it has to do with anything.’

‘Mr Adams, in a murder case anything could be relevant,’ Jones replied, calmly.

‘She is writing to *you*,’ DI Stephens said softly. ‘If nothing else, it shows how close you were two years ago when her book came out. Maybe it’s important, maybe not.’

The sweat was running off him now. The young policeman was staring, his eyes narrowed. His head now blocked the light switch and the room had assumed some symmetry.

She smiled. 'There was something else.'

He leaned forward, trying to listen, though avoiding any eye contact. He could barely hear Stephens. Her voice was little more than a whisper. 'On your laptop – and Cathy's. The hard drives contain the same files for *On Angels' Wings*. Research, writing, everything. I, *we* thought it was odd. I mean, Sergeant Jones, do you share files with your husband?'

'No way,' Sergeant Jones said, with a grin. Chris risked a glance at her. For a moment, their eyes locked. A flash of triumph lit hers from within.

'I ... I can't imagine that kind of intimacy.' Stephens said. 'She must have trusted you so much.'

He swallowed. Just the word *intimacy* made him feel sick ... 'I used to proofread her work before she sent it off. Check for spelling mistakes, that kind of thing –'

'And her emails? All her accounts are administrated from your laptop.'

He stared at the door. The young policeman had moved and revealed the light switch. Everything was askew again. 'It was too much. The fans, the people writing. I used to ... To help.'

DI Stephens looked knowingly at her colleague. Sergeant Jones sat forward, her hands clenched together on the desk as though in prayer. 'I'm not so sure about trust, Rachel. More like he was checking up on her. Maybe you didn't trust your wife at all, Christopher. Needed to know what she was doing twenty-four-seven, who was messaging, what she was writing. That's not helping, that's spying.'

Hot. Too hot. He shifted on the plastic chair and caught, in the eye of the young copper, a flash of what? Sympathy? Please, not sympathy. Anything but that. He looked away, but it was too late. He was brimming up. The windowpane rattled; snow, hail, smashing against it as the condensation built up inside.

'I wasn't ... Not spying. It wasn't for that ...' He fought for words. 'It was insurance, a backup computer. All the files were –'

‘There is cloud storage,’ Sergeant Jones reminded. ‘Cathy herself had a tablet computer and memory drives. I’m sure she could have emailed drafts of work to her agent. Why would she need to copy all her files onto your laptop? The machines weren’t even networked. Someone had to laboriously copy the work from one computer to another.’

DI Stephens smiled. Her voice was soft and calm. ‘We’re just trying to understand Cathy’s last months, you see. Check out anything that strikes us as odd. It makes sense, of course it does, to copy files over. Let’s face it, Chris, people of our age don’t quite trust anything that is supposed to exist on a cloud – even angels. And your wife was a well-known author. The words on that machine were her bread and butter. Of course, it is perfectly rational to have two computers. If one breaks down, then there is always another.’

He allowed the breath that he had held for some moments to seep away as Jones launched in with a fresh attack. ‘But it must have rankled, Christopher. Her friendship with Alex Wadsworth. Was that what you were scared of, your wife having relationships you didn’t know about? Is that why you copied everything?’

The sweat was dripping into his eyes, running down his back inside the plastic lined paper suit. Finger out of his mouth at last, he gripped the table. He’d known, of course, that it would come to this smash and grab of evidence, that the grubby secrets of their married life would be unearthed sooner or later, but still, he was not prepared. Not for the embarrassment, for the shame of it.

‘Mr Adams, you have blood all over your mouth,’ DI Stephens said.

Sergeant Jones took a tissue from her pocket and handed it to him. He dabbed ineffectually at his bitten lip.

‘Seems they met several years ago.’ the DI continued. ‘Alex was single, living alone in that old farmhouse. When was it you actually moved out of the family home?’

Jones sniffed. She was laughing, he was sure, but he couldn’t lift his gaze from the desk to find out.

DI Stephens didn’t wait. ‘You took the flat on Blackstone Road almost five months ago, in June.’



‘I didn’t know when they met,’ he muttered.

‘How did you feel, Chris, to have to move out of the house, to split from your wife of eighteen years: hurt, angry?’

He swallowed, recited the practised lie. ‘It was a mutual decision. Cathy wanted space for a while. It was only supposed to be temporary.’

‘And yet you continued to remotely monitor her emails –’ Sergeant Jones sneezed, spraying the table with droplets of mucus. He leaned away.

‘It wasn’t like that.’ When would they leave him alone? He had important work to do, work that they were delaying. ‘Cathy wanted to work on her own. She had another Novel but there was still other work to be done –’

‘This new novel,’ Sergeant Jones pressed. ‘It wasn’t on your hard drive. Was she writing this alone –’

‘She was writing it the old-fashioned way – in longhand, in hard backed notebooks. Her new novel was titled *The Wolf*,’ DI Stephens butted in. It’s in a very different style. Almost as though it was written by someone else.’

Chris gripped the tissue. If only it wasn’t so hot in here. Jones was tapping a pen against her teeth, awaiting his reply. DI Stephens remained motionless: a cat scenting prey.

‘I don’t know what she was writing.’ He wished he could block his ears, stem the tide of stupid questions and accusations. *The Wolf*. Cathy had taunted him, said she’d discovered things, and implied he was too stupid to see the evidence under his own eyes. Just what had she been doing all those hours in the family history section of the library? Just what had she found?

‘Elijah Thomas’s dirty secret,’ she’d thrown at him but no matter how much he begged her, no matter what he did she never said any more and he’d concluded she’d been playing with him; cat and mouse. And now it was too late.

He looked up at the young officer. His face had become a mask, smooth and unlined; any sympathy was gone. How old was he, twenty-two, three, tops? Chris could feel the outer edges of himself lose distinction from the background. He was beginning to crumble, the surface of him eroding, sliding away like earth in a landslide. What would be

left of him? What was left of the mill girls under that massive gravestone: bones, remnants of clothing? The smell in the room was growing in intensity: rot, putrefaction. Was he dead, too, his corpse rotting after years of containment in the stinking box of his own flesh?

‘It must have been difficult.’ Stephens’ voice was soft, almost a whisper. ‘Being married to a woman who was so well known, so successful.’

He swallowed and forced a smile. That question, framed so often, always wrongly. ‘It was good. Fine. I never thought of it as difficult.’

She studied him like a specimen under a microscope. He wondered how he appeared to her. ‘And yet you were the star at university.’

‘It was a long time ago.’

‘A double first.’ Stephens’ voice betrayed her admiration. ‘And then the Masters. The professorial prize for the year. You were the golden boy back then, whereas Cathy dropped out.’

‘It d...didn’t make any –’

‘And yet you haven’t done a lot since – a part time job, then made redundant and ... what?’

A knock on the door and another officer came and asked for DI Stephens. She snapped off the recorder. ‘That’s enough for now, Mr Adams. Interview terminated at three-oh-five pm.’

**Transcript of police interview with Alexander Wadsworth (AW) ,  
conducted by Detective Inspector Rachel Stephens (RS) of  
Scardale Constabulary at Miss Wadsworth's home, Briarside  
Farm, Balden, Rawton Bridge 2015**

AW: I am Alexander Wadsworth. I own the stud farm up at Balden.

RS: Thank you for coming in to the station, Miss Wadsworth. You are not under arrest but I want to talk to you about Cathy Adams.

AW: What about her?

RS: Are you aware that Mrs Adams' body was found on DATE

AW: It has been on the national news.

RS: How long have you known Mrs Adams?

AW: About three years.

RS: You met at the Women's Centre in Grimford, is that correct?

AW: I told you on the phone. She was being psychologically abused by her husband.

RS: And you didn't think that was odd - a woman of her standing, a bestselling author - would be reporting a case of psychological abuse?

AW: Her book hadn't come out then and anyway, she didn't think she was abused. She couldn't see it. She was referred to the centre by her doctor. She was having trouble sleeping and he'd recommended a Yoga class. My back was playing up at the time so I took the class too. One of the ways the Women's Centre gets women to understand what has happened to them is through activities like Yoga and Pilates ... It wasn't long before Cathy began to talk.

RS: About Christopher?

AW: He'd kept her a virtual prisoner for years. She sacrificed everything to live with him in Rawton Bridge, then he demanded she help him with his pathetic research project. When she started writing, Chris was on at her all the time, correcting her work, intercepting emails. Trying to control everything.



## Plate 19

RS: So?

AW: Me - and the other women in the group- told her to leave him. And she did try. She was going to sell up and move on, but then, something happened and she stopped coming to Yoga. I didn't see her again until a year or so later and by then her book had been published and things seemed to be going okay for her. At least she could get away from him. We bumped into each other in Rawton Bridge, got chatting, swapped numbers and got friendly.

RS: How friendly?

AW: She was a friend. I was trying to help her.

RS: I am placing a bagged greeting card on the table. This was found in its envelope in the drawer of Mrs Adams' dressing table. There is a picture of a pony on the front. Inside, is a hand written message: 'Constant Craving - can't stop thinking of you. Here if you need me, A xxx'. 'Constant Craving' is a song by K.D. Lang, I believe?

AW: Yes. A lesbian singer.

RS: And do you recognise this card, Miss Wadsworth?

AW: Okay, I did have a thing for Cath. She was a special woman, you know. Good looking, smart ... Funny.

RS: The postmark on the envelope is from only three weeks ago.

AW: We'd grown pretty close since Chris left. I thought it was worth another try.

RS: What was her response to the card?

AW: She told me it was sweet, that she thought the world of me and she was flattered but she wasn't into women ... Her usual response.

RS: But it didn't cause problems in your friendship?

AW: No. I guess, I thought that one day she would change her mind. In the meantime, it was enough to be friends. And she needed friends. Especially with Chris doing the Twitter thing. Cathy got totally freaked.

RS: Twitter?

AW: Yeah. At first she never realised, just thought it was some fan but then it got nasty.

RS: So Chris was being nasty on Twitter to the woman he lived with? Isn't that a bit complicated?

AW: Went under the name of 'Miller'. It was pretty creepy. He seemed to know stuff that no one but Chris could know and that's when she sussed it and talked to me. I did tell her to call you in months ago, when Miller turned nasty but she wouldn't. She thought it would make things worse. I'm sure you can find it on her page.

RS: Tell me when you last saw her.

AW: The night before last. I left around one thirty in the morning. One of my horses was suffering from colic.

RS: Can anyone corroborate this?

AW: Lucy-Ann - who works for me - texted at around twelve. She'd been looking after Salome and was concerned. She had gone home before I arrived back at the farm.

RS: How was Mrs Adams that night?

AW: Well, she'd drunk more than a bottle of wine so she was pretty tuned in, but she was fine. We had a laugh. She was on with her new book. The only thing bringing her down was the way Jake - that's her son - was acting. You know, typical teenage stuff, leaving a mess everywhere, communicating in grunts.

RS: Did you drink wine that evening?

AW: Yes.

RS: And yet you drove back to the farm?

AW: I only had a couple of glasses and Cath had cooked some quinoa thing with pomegranate. Not usually my kind of food, but I ate it. I also had a coffee before I left.

RS: So you wouldn't say you were drunk?

AW: No way! Cath wasn't drunk either, just, you know, merry. She'd had food and coffee ...

RS: Was she drunk enough, in your opinion, to have fallen and sustained injuries.

AW: Well, I can't absolutely say no, I suppose, I mean anyone can have an accident, though she was going up to bed, when I left so I am not sure where she would have fallen. Oh, God, you mean something happened to her that night? I ... I thought she was killed the next day?

RS: She was. But some of her injuries were hours older than those that killed her. Did you often see Mrs Adams drunk?

AW: You mean, was she a lush? No way. She liked a few glasses of wine, nothing over the top. Look, what is this about, do you think whoever killed her hurt her beforehand too?

RS: So, given the amount of wine Mrs Adams drank that evening, you don't think she would have been drunk enough in the morning to have fallen and injured herself?

AW: What? She might have had a bit of a hangover but not to the point where she was falling over.

RS: Thanks for your help, Miss Wadsworth. At this point we will finish the interview.

## **Jake**

*You know that I am here for you.*

There it was again, his morning call, the horrible reminder of his mother's brutal murder. Eight-thirty on the dot. Some freak had programmed it to text his phone every day, he was sure. He thrust the phone back in his pocket and continued to walk. Later, he'd hand it in to the police.

He'd never been up here before, to Hanging Naze estate on the edge of the hill overlooking the valley. It was a no-go area, full of chavs with tattoos up their arms and pit bulls at their sides. But kids on this estate got respect. At school, teachers would treat them like scumbags, hiding pens and other nickables from their grasping hands but the other kids, the nice middle-class kids, would suck up to them, giving up dinner money and following them round like sheep. How come Maddie lived here?

It was a nightmare climb. The wind tore at his lungs as he trudged up the steep road. Any more rain and sleet and it would turn into a river. As it was, the gutters were running full and water bubbled up through holes in the tarmac. The estate, as he turned in, was silent in the grey, early morning light of a November Saturday, the identical council houses still curtained, the roads empty of cars. The only sounds were the distant bark of a dog and the stifled crow of a cockerel. He breathed the air. It was cleaner up here where Rawton Moor met the Sinai Heights above the town, quiet and peaceful. The rain had stopped, and a mist rose up. He could see across the valley to Cragside, the black rocks bursting through the grey mist like islands in a stormy sea. He wished he could see further, out across Lancashire to the West, to the sea, to Ireland and America, to as far away from Rawton Bridge as he could get. To freedom.

He walked past a run-down community centre, a converted house where a tatty sign, proclaimed, 'this is your space' in kids' writing, and stopped for a moment. This was a stupid idea. Stupid, stupid, stupid. Turning into Evan Street, he looked up at the blank windows of each house for some sign, but they gave nothing away. The gardens varied in tidiness, but there was nothing to distinguish one house as hers. A little swing park formed the centre of the estate. He entered it now and sat on a moulded sheep. Where was she? He tried to remember the feel of Maddie's lips against his, the light touch of her

hands on his body. Had he imagined yesterday – was it only yesterday? – and extracted from his pocket the one can of cheap lager he'd managed to blag from the lass at Zed's offie. Overhead, a flapping sound; he looked up and saw a heron making its way through the mist. For some reason, the sight of that impossibly huge bird in flight made him want to cry.

'They always look weird, don't they, in the sky?' A soft voice came from behind him and he turned quickly, almost falling over in his haste.

'Maddie!'

She was wearing a dressing gown with some crazy leopard print. Her cider hair was messy. In the half light, her skin glowed.

'Are you just here to spot birds?' she asked. 'If I were you, though, I'd ditch that can of beer. The Neighbourhood Watch lot don't like drinking on the children's park. They're probably twitching their curtains right now.'

'What?' He looked to see if she was joking, but her face was deathly serious. She pointed to a sign that banned alcohol, dogs and stiletto shoes, and advanced towards him, holding out her hand. In a trance of disbelief, he handed over the can. She put it to her lips and took a good long drink, then poured the rest away onto the grass.

'Our Stacey was crying, and Mum didn't wake so I got up and happened to look out of the window,' she said. 'It's a bit early, don't you think, or haven't you been to bed yet?'

'Something like that.' In truth, he'd been too scared to switch the light off. He'd kept thinking of his mum and how she'd sung him the Ninna Nanna song. Now Maddie was here, in front of him, the fears of the night fled.

'But you did go back to your Grandad's – after I went home. Did you talk to him? Tell him about those weird messages?'

He'd called into his dad's flat on the way back but there was no one in. Back at Bony's, Jake had gone straight up to bed without bothering to call into the studio. He hadn't wanted to spend any time with that old perv and get nagged for running off from the police. He'd tried to sleep but the same stuff kept going round and round his head. At around four, he'd got dressed, made a cup of tea and sat in the kitchen looking at his

homework diary, trying to work out whether it was worth staying at school and getting enough A levels to go to uni, or escape sooner – get a job at some holiday camp like his mate Gino had in the summer. Gino reckoned there were all kinds of jobs abroad if you looked, ski lodges in the Alps or Club Med. He could work anywhere in the world. But it was no good. He couldn't stop thinking about his mum. He couldn't stop crying. He needed a good diversion and Maddie had been the best one he could think of.

‘You're not looking so good, Jake,’ she said now, peering at him with concern.

‘Cheers.’ He kicked at the ground. This was a disaster. What did he expect of her? He never should have come.

‘You're shivering. Why don't you come inside and have a cup of tea or something? Warm up.’

What could he say? Maddie was standing before him, a private Maddie, with her bed hair and dressing gown just open enough at the neck to reveal the white cotton lacy thing she had on beneath, her soft throat. He nodded dumbly.

‘Tea, coffee, hot chocolate or ...’ she rummaged on a shelf, ‘Ovaltine?’ The kitchen was quite big. It took up half of the ground floor of the little house. The pine shelves were full of bottles and packets. An oil-cloth-covered table dominated the centre of the room. Over the walls, children's paintings, certificates and photos hid the faded wallpaper. It was a proper family kitchen.

‘Mum calls that our “chamber of horrors”’. Maddie flicked on the kettle and joined him at the table. ‘Some terrible ones of me, look!’ She pointed to a photo of a little girl, obviously herself, sitting on the back of a seaside donkey, her face screwed up in tears. ‘I hated that donkey. It had the worst yellow teeth and I was sure it was going to bite me! But Dad had to get a pic.’

Jake tried to smile, but he was very near tears himself. ‘Hot chocolate would be good,’ he managed at last, then immediately despised himself. Hot chocolate! She would think we was a right dick.

‘Okay. I'll have the same.’ She filled up the kettle but somewhere in the house, a small voice wailed. ‘Maddwie, Maddwie. Where are you?’



‘That’s our Stacey,’ Maddie said, her back to him. ‘She thinks I’m at her beck and call. I left her sleeping in my bed, now I guess she’s woken. I’ll leave her for a bit and see if Mum gets to her.’

Jake looked again at the family pictures, and noticed a small one, tucked into the frame of a family group shot; a recent one of Maddie, obviously taken at a passport booth. She was serious, her eyes looking straight ahead, into the camera. Her hair was neatly tied back, the way she wore it at school. On impulse, he reached out, grabbed the picture and shoved it in the pocket of his jeans. Immediately, he regretted the action. What kind of idiot would Maddie think he was, if she saw what he had done?

‘I am glad you came, actually,’ she said, gazing out of the window. ‘I was talking to your mates. You know, Dino and Andy Major. They’re worried about you.’

‘Oh, yeah?’ What the fuck would that pair of numpties have to say about him?

‘Yeah. Said you’ve been messing around with booze. Weed ... and stuff.’

‘For fuck’s sake, who do they think they are? Not exactly clean themselves, are they. Dino’s off his nuts on K half the time.’

‘Okay, Jake, it’s not me that’s saying anything. Only, thought you should know, there are rumours, people saying stuff. I don’t believe them, course I don’t but I wanted to hear it from you –’

‘What?’

Carefully, she poured hot water into the instant chocolate and stirred the cups. She brought them over to the table and sat opposite him. ‘They’re talking about that night. You know, the night before your mum got ... The night before she was killed.’

Jake closed his eyes. That night, that fucking night. It would never leave him.

‘Is it okay –’

‘Okay? How can it be okay? How can anything ever be okay ever again?’ He jumped up and stared at Maddie, so sweet, so *innocent* in her happy family kitchen, and knowing he would be an outsider the rest of his life. The son of a murdered woman.

‘Your hot chocolate. Not too sweet or anything?’ Maddie’s voice was patient. The kind of voice he could bet she used on the child who was crying out her name from upstairs.

‘Shit, sorry. I’m kind of, you know, strung out? The chocolate is fine. Great.’

‘Sit down, Jake. Look, you’ve been through a lot and I’m ... well, I’m your mate, okay?’

He plonked himself back down into his chair and put his hands around the cup, feeling the warmth seep into them. The word ‘mate’ was a pisser. He’d wanted a bit more than that.

‘You need to talk to someone. The other day when we went to your Mum – your house, you didn’t say anything about the day it actually happened. I mean, it must be totally weird to think that you were in the house, when she was dead.’

He took a deep breath and held it. He heard the milk bottles clinking down on the step outside, the roar of the milkman’s quad bike. A radio in the house next door was playing tinny pop. He thought of Alex’s hatred of his dad. ‘Yeah. I had no idea. I went out to school in the morning and by the time I got home ...’

Maddie clasped his hand. ‘The Major said you were totally out of it the night before. You’d met them down at the skate park and drunk a load of cider and vodka, then smoked some weed. They said you could hardly walk.’

‘So?’

‘So, Dino walked you home. You were all out of cash by this time. He said it was really late. Do you remember, Jake? Do you remember any of it?’

He shook his head. The night had blurred into a series of indistinct impressions, none of them clear enough to be able to describe. The trees, the skate park, some old guy playing weird music. He’d drunk and smoked, just wanting to forget.

‘Dino said you were really angry with your mum. He reckoned that’s why you’d got so wasted. He said all night you were calling her a *controlling bitch*, and moaning on about Alex Wadsworth, and all sorts. You managed to put off that lass he fancies, you know, Sara, from Year Nine? Apparently, you told her to do one when she came up. She was right annoyed ... Dino said He had to drag you up the hill to yours. He made sure you got into the house, but he was worried about you ...’

‘And what?’ Why was she telling him all this? What had it got to do with her, with anything? He stared down at the plastic tablecloth: it was red with white spots, some of which had been coloured with indelible pen.

‘It was the night before she was killed, Jake. In the Rawton Times it said she died the next afternoon – around midday. Dino said you were mad as hell. Jake, people are starting to think you might have something to do with her death.’

He pulled his hand away from Maddie’s, so she couldn’t feel it shake. He couldn’t remember getting home that night, not Dino getting him back or anything he might have said. He’d gone straight to bed but woken in the early hours

She leaned across the table and put her hands on his shoulders, her palms warm and protecting. She was too good for him, too kind. ‘Just tell me what happened, all of it,’ she urged. ‘We can work it out together. I know you didn’t kill her. You just need to make sure everyone else knows too.’

‘Me and Mum, we’d had an argument.’ The words came out in a rush, whooshing from his mouth on a tide of relief. ‘The day it happened. That Alex Wadsworth, you know, the horsey woman, she’d been round the night before but sneaked off around two in the morning. As if I wouldn’t know. I’d *heard* them for freak’s sake. I needed a pee and looked out of the window and saw her climbing into her freakin car. Everyone knew she and my mum were at it. It was Dino who started taking the piss about her slurping her way round my mother! Totally gross!’

‘Go on,’ Maddie urged quietly.

‘I felt such an idiot. Everyone calling Mum a rugmuncher and her pretending nothing was going on.’

Maddie frowned. ‘So much for all that stuff about gender and sexual stereotyping we did with Barnesy in PSHCE.’

‘The next morning, Mum never even mentioned that anyone had been there. She never even said Alex Wadsworth’s name. Acted like I was some kind of dick who couldn’t dress himself. Instead she started going on about other stuff. About me drinking and who tidied the house and how much work she had to do to keep me in clothes and

food. Said I'd end up a waster like my dad, all because I didn't put my dirty washing in the basket. I was so pissed off and hungover and –'

'So, what happened?'

He took a sip of chocolate; its hot sweetness wrapped him around like a blanket, calming him. He started again, trying to include everything that mattered, everything that had been spinning round in his head in the small hours of the morning. 'I got really mad. Since Dad moved out, in fact even before that, she's hardly bothered to *look* at me. Treats me like some freakin inconvenience. I swear she likes writing those stupid books more than she likes having anything to do with me. Then, that morning, she started carrying on like I was some kind of monster ...'

Maddie pressed his arm, encouragingly. 'What happened, Jake?'

'I ... I got mad. I kept trying to talk to her, to tell her but she wouldn't listen. Honest, Maddie, she just went on and on and then ... Then I hit her.'

'*Hit* her? Your *mum*?'

'I was just trying to get her to *listen*. Honest, I had never done anything like that before. I was just so angry. She was all smug and it was *her fault* Dad left. Poor Dad was stuck in that shitty bedsit while she ... She got all the money and the nice house, and it was like Dad had never even existed, even though they'd been married like forever and had me and everything. And he helped with her work. You know, he even opened all her letters and answered her emails ...' He took a deep breath to calm himself. 'She emptied everything out that was his, you know. Loads of his vinyl records and books and stuff, dumped in cardboard boxes down the front path. He never even got some of them. The binmen took them. And I thought ... I thought, she'll kick me out, too. She'll wipe me out, delete any evidence of me like I –'

'But you hit her, Jake.'

He stood up, knocking hot chocolate onto the table. He had to get her to understand. 'She just wouldn't listen to anything I said. And then I realised that she had never ever listened to me. Or to Dad. She just sat up there in her office room on her own banging away on her laptop with Dad making her drinks and stuff all the time. She just wanted to write books, not be with us. And then to have a ... a fucking lesbo affair with *that woman*,

though ...’ He thought of Alex’s admission that there had been no affair and flushed. Had he been wrong?

‘Jake, this is serious. Important. Have you told the police?’

He sat down again with a thud. More hot chocolate slopped onto the pine table top. Maddie wiped it away with a piece of kitchen roll. ‘Course not. Do you think I am a dick or something? If I said I’d hit her then they’d –’

‘But, how was she? After you’d hit her? I mean, was she okay? Was she hurt?’

He closed his eyes tight. Fuck, maybe he shouldn’t have said anything. Now Maddie thought he was a violent thug who went round hitting defenceless women. ‘I don’t know, not really. I mean, I hit her. Not hard. She was coming towards me, going on and on and I just wanted to *speak*. I hit – pushed her more like – on the shoulder and she fell. She was crying by this time, making this god-awful freakin noise. But her fall wasn’t like, a proper fall. She more like *collapsed*. And she hit her head on the table –’ The regret washed over him in a warm tide. His mum had crumpled down onto the tiles in the kitchen; she’d been looking at him in a way that was so sad. So *sorry*. ‘And then she just said: “Get out, Jake. Get out.” And I stared at her for a few moments, but she wouldn’t look at me. Instead she lay herself down on the floor like a baby or something, curled around and kind of singing to herself, half under the kitchen table, half out. It was a total head-fuck. And I left her like this and went to school. It was the last time I saw her alive.’ Just saying it aloud, the stuff that had been rattling round his head for days, made him realise the hugeness of it, the terrible fact. Alex had accused his dad of domestic violence. If he, Jake was capable of hitting his mum, then maybe his father was too. Maybe it was some curse on the family. ‘Sit down, Jake. You need to think this through properly. You ... You *hitting* your mum on *the day* she gets *murdered*. Well, it’s like serious, isn’t it? What if, I mean, what if what happened to your mum – the stabbing – is something to do with ... I mean, what if the murderer came in and she couldn’t escape because you hurt her?’

‘No!’ Jake brought his fist down on the table. ‘She wasn’t that hurt, honest. She was just like, winded.’

Maddie sat back in her chair and looked up at him with such shock, such disappointment in her grey eyes that his cheeks burned and his gaze slid away from hers. He didn't need her to show him it wasn't exactly cool to go around hitting your mum. He'd thought this a thousand times and every time he came out looking a total bastard. If only Mum had listened to him that morning, let him say what he needed to, that he would clean his room and help more around the house; he would do anything she wanted if only she would get things back to how they were.

A door slammed upstairs, and a woman's voice echoed down into the hall. 'Come on, sleepyhead! Time to rise and shine!'

'I'd better go,' Jake said. He was very tired; his limbs were heavy and his head throbbed. He looked around the homely kitchen and felt a surge of misery. Now everything was wrecked between himself and Maddie. There would be no hope of another kiss. Girls fancied lads who were sad and vulnerable. It brought out the mothering instinct. Psychos who hit their mothers didn't stand a chance.

'Yes.' Her voice was barely a whisper. 'I'll see you out.'

'I ... I'm sorry.'

'It's not me you should be apologising to,' she said, opening the front door.

'I know.' He turned and looked at her. She was so beautiful in the morning light, her bright hair, making the cold day warmer somehow. He patted the stolen photo in his pocket, knowing that it was all he would keep of Maddie, and walked away.

From 1850 onwards, the popular children's rhyme, 'Eli goes to market' appears in altered form in Rawton Bridge, West Yorkshire. The mood of the more traditional version: Eli goes to market/To find a bonny maid/Sets his cap to pretty Nell/And soon they will be wed, is transformed by the substitution of the last line of each verse with: 'But soon she will be dead'. Other verses were recorded by Lady Douglas Fairfax (1856-1943) in the 1906 publication of her *Rhymes and Folklaw of Scardale*, now considered a definitive collection, cited by the Opies and other experts in the field.

Eli goes to market,  
To find a bonny maid,  
Sets his cap to Mary-Ann,  
But soon she will be dead.

Eli goes to market  
To find a bonny maid  
Sets his cap to Jenny May  
But soon she will be dead

Eli goes to market  
To find a bonny maid  
Sets his cap to little Sall  
But soon she will be dead.

Twenty-five of these verses, featuring Polly Priest, Lizzie Bette, Charlotte-Anne, Emmeline and others appeared in the book, though Lady Fairfax, in her footnote to the traditional version of the rhyme, stated that as this was a skipping song, children could include as many as they liked, often adding their own names as they counted each girl in. But the Scardale rendition was always limited to twenty-five girls, with a final chilling verse:

Eli went to market  
A batch of maids to curse  
Took them to his new house  
And laid them in the earth.

Why this regional variation is so dark and the significance of the altered lines remains shrouded in mystery. The Scardale version of *Eli goes to market* is still sung as a skipping song in the school playground of Rawton Bridge as this book goes to print in 1987. We will never know who the

## **Bony**

The morning was all cinnabar and ochre. Mist swirling in the valley bottom, a tang of wood smoke in the air. Sam had asked to meet at her hotel, The Fleece, which looked out onto Rawton town square and backed onto Balden Water. The beck rose in the colder months and sometimes almost dried up in July. Winter or summer, the smell of damp oozed through the walls of the old packhorse inn and Bony wondered at her decision to stay there rather than his place. Maybe needed head-space for her film, time out to order her thoughts. He glanced at his watch: ten-thirty, better get a move on. He parked the car behind the medical centre on Blackstone Road and hurried to the inn.

No film had been shot yesterday. They'd spent some time chatting and he'd shown her some of his back catalogue. The plan was to get going this morning with a tour around the town. Although it was a wrench to leave his painting, it sure was good to be out and about on a day like this. He took a deep draught of wintry air. No rain, for once and the snow that threatened yesterday had not yet arrived though charcoal grey clouds were building. And there she was, waiting for him in the doorway of The Fleece, still as a shop mannequin, her face painted like a doll, incongruous in this soft light. She offered the side of her cheek for kissing, and then the other in the continental manner. A line of makeup around the edge of her jaw gave her face a mask like quality. It made him pity her, somehow.

'Have you always lived here?' she asked as they stepped out into the market square where the sculpture of a needle dominated. The cold bit and a few drops of icy rain blew against his cheek making him wince.

'Over forty years.' He thought of his brief time in California in the mid-sixties, the warmth seeping into his bones. Maybe he should have stayed over there where the skies were wider, the horizons distant and yet even as the memories came to him, he dismissed them. Rawton Bridge had got under his skin in a way that nowhere else could. It was in his blood.



They set off down Market Street, at the end of which the Blackstone Road cut through the valley, providing the link between two distant cities. Across the road, the hillside rose steeply up to Cragside, though this morning the top was obscured by thick white mist.

‘You moved here when you were, what, twenty-five?’ she asked, stopping for a moment to take a still shot of the crag. ‘Don’t young men usually want to live it up in the city?’

He patted her hand. It was clad in chill lavender leather. ‘You’ve done your homework! See that?’ He pointed up at the vertiginous, thickly wooded mudstone heights. Undercliff Mill chimney penetrated the mist, a dark slick of umber in the swirling grey. ‘That is why I had to be here. Before, I had been raised in London, then stayed in LA, Paris. I thought I needed cities. But the moment I saw this valley I knew that this was where I belonged.’

Sam snapped a couple of photos then returned her old-fashioned SLR camera to its case and took a digital video camera from her pocket. She fixed the lens upon his lips as he spoke. He became self-conscious; aware of his age and how he might appear on film, a withered old man with hollows beneath his eyes and a Moscow pallor. He wondered, briefly, if the film would be his swan song.

‘And yet your early work was nothing to do with the landscape,’ she said. They were now at the edge of the main road. Keeping his hand on the lavender glove, they crossed and stood a moment by the park railings, looking back across the way they had come and up the opposite valley, their breath billowing around them in the damp air.

‘Nope,’ he said, thoughtfully. ‘But people change, you know? Art changes.’

‘Maybe so, but your change was pretty dramatic. You’ve gone from modernism to pop to –’

‘See that.’ He rose, indicated with a sweep of his arm the darkened stone of the town, and the swell of the south facing hillside to Underbank School with its five-pointed roofs, its arched windows. ‘Matisse would have loved the shapes here, could have cut out card of a paler colour and built the town from pastels and umbers but I ... I wanted to go back, further back in history. I’d spent over four years in Art School and had modernism

rammed down my throat. Carol Weight, my tutor at the Royal College, all he wanted to see was pop, pop and more pop. I was already all popped out when I left in sixty-eight.'

Sam shivered and took her hand from his in a way that hinted she had been waiting for the first opportunity to remove it. 'But you didn't paint landscape till much later – the late eighties,' she said. Your representations of women; that was the subject matter that made your name – like the ones in the Portico exhibition in sixty-nine – there was no landscape painting there.'

Bony felt cold, bloodless. He put his hands in the pockets of his old waxed jacket and took a sideways glance at his companion. He noticed a neat line of grey in the parting of her hair, and the makeup around her eyes emphasised her laughter lines; she was older than she first appeared. He sighed. In sixty-nine, Chris was born. In sixty-nine, he had a wife and a home, but already the stifling pressure of domesticity was squeezing the life out of him. The paintings in the Portico had been his cry for help. Art had changed so much. Once it had all been about the power of the line, the purity of the image: Beauty is truth, truth beauty. But such a notion was dying, even in his own young day, giving way to a slippage in skill, a presumptuous decadence.

'You were a hero of the pop age. In that painting in Tate London, *Starlet!* The girl just craving fame, you predicted the vacuous celebrity culture . . .'

Bony smiled indulgently and began to walk towards Wesley Street with its new cafes and coffee shops, its pretensions to cosmopolitan life. 'It was not just about subject matter, lady, but paint, the way I put on the canvas.'

She scurried along beside him. 'But that other piece, *Parade*. A woman lying on a battlefield: such a statement against the Vietnam war.'

Someone, oh, more years ago that he cared to remember, once warned him that his critics and his fans would interpret his work as they wanted, judging it through the lens of the times in which they lived. When the painting was first shown, he'd been accused of painting the battle of the sexes.

'Its past history now,' he replied, indulgently. *Parade* had been about his marriage, if anything.

She sniffed. Her face was pinched. A couple of local women bustled by, on their way to the bus stop, their complexions grey and doughy but their bodies were Rubenesque, upholstered as new sofas, all breasts and stomachs, hips and rounded legs. They made Sam seem insubstantial as a wisp of the cigarette smoke blustering from their ceaselessly chattering mouths.

‘You want a coffee?’ he suggested, anxious now to get her out of the cold that made her hunched and old. ‘It’s not the best day for wandering round town.’

They chose one of the newer shops, owned by a petite southern European woman with a beautiful bone structure and he was briefly reminded of his mother hanging a print of Tretchikoff’s famous green lady over the fireplace, taking down his own portrait of herself in her housecoat and sticking it in the by-then-unused coal cellar. The green lady had been the subject of a bet with Humphrey Lyde, who’d decided he came from such lowly stock they would be impressed with such kitsch. He had been right. The painting of his mother was returned when he cleared the house after her death and he still had it somewhere. It was always good when his work found its way home. Sam sat opposite him but did not remove her jacket. Her face was to the window and he could now see a filigree of violet and Prussian blue veins at her temples. Vaguely he remembered another whose inner workings were so close to the surface of her skin. She took out the camera and a little stand, which she fussed with as he read out the menu. They both chose coffee with milk, almond croissants.

Happy with the angle of her camera, she finally looked at him. ‘Bony, you moved here, to Rawton Bridge in 1970?’

He nodded, conscious again of the lens recording every nuance of tone and expression.

‘With your wife, Sylvie, and your baby son?’ Their coffees arrived then, the Spanish woman clinking cups and plates down and asking ‘everything okey dokey, sir, madam?’ The southern inflection was out of place but most welcome as the shop door opened and jingled and the smell of cold and exhaust entered.

Sylvie never fitted into Rawton Bridge. She never really fitted into England. She hated pop with its gaudy pallet, its masculine appreciation of consumer culture. Right from the start, her tasteful ceramics, with their earthy forms and natural glazes, marked

her out as different. ‘I met her at art school,’ he said, taking a sip of coffee. He would add some sugar to sweeten the memories that were crowding in. ‘She was from *gay Paris*, capital of the art world, or so I thought then. She was tiny, like a little bird, black eyes and hair.’ It was easy to reconjure her; she had never really gone away. She was in Chrissie’s feminine features and slim wrists, his inability to deal with life. Besides, there were paintings of her, drawings he had never the heart to throw away. He remembered, with a sense of dread, the painting of Cathy then, the only one he had ever attempted. If only he had been happier to discard those works he deemed failures. But there was always something there, some swipe of the brush, a bloom of viridian beneath a cheek, or the hint of sunlight on golden hair that made him keep them. They were a secret hoard that spoke more about his skill than any of the successful paintings.

‘Sylvie left you.’ Sam cut through his reminiscence. ‘In December 1979. Your son was only eight at the time, left asleep in his bed. She packed a suitcase and walked out. You were away. She never even said goodbye to her own child. He woke to an empty house. I found an old press report on the internet.’

He wished he was sitting where Sam was, so that he could look out onto the street and the people scurrying by, rather than into the gloomy interior of the café. It was all too easy to sink back into the darkness of that time. ‘She did,’ he replied. Everything was slowing, the air becoming thick, black, and viscous. ‘She had been ill for some time. Depressed –’

‘The article said you were often away. I quote: “The toll of bringing up a child alone, giving up her art was heavy on her”.’

‘They said a lot of things,’ he murmured. ‘But who knows that was going on in her head? She never mentioned it to me.’ The café owner’s phone rang, and she answered in Spanish.

Sam clattered her cup onto her saucer. ‘Did you ever hear from her?’

When would she stop? This was all ancient history. So long ago. So much water under so many bridges. ‘I tried to contact her. Of course, I did. Went through every friend she had but no one knew a thing, or they were keeping shtum. Over the years, there have been rumours about her living in Mexico City in an artist’s commune, or in Sweden

on some lake in some kind of eco set up. But who knows. She left. That's all there is to it.'

'So, what then? You were still a young man. You must have been lonely.' A new tone had entered Sam's voice; the smooth transatlantic burr was polluted with some complex new emotion.

'Huh?' He finished his cup and looked up at her.

'Women,' she said, grinning encouragingly. 'You had a reputation.'

He gave a half smile. 'Don't believe everything you read.'

She had picked up her camera. The black lens was accusing, a probing eye, searching out the truth.

'When Sylvie left, I was devastated. She ... She was my lover, muse, my –' Why were his eyes pricking with tears? What the hell was this woman doing to him? He had never cried for Sylvie. That part of him was dammed up years ago. It was too late for remorse now. Too late to make amends.

Someone dropped a plate or a glass in the kitchen. Oaths, Anglo-Saxon oaths, filled the air, the smell of burning, black smoke billowing. He knew a sudden need to be out of there, where he could breathe fresh air again. Sam left the camera whirring and pulled a piece of paper out of her pocket. 'I also found this article on the net – it's from *The Gallery* magazine in 1981. I printed it out.' She unfolded it and briefly flashed it to him. He caught a glimpse of 'Sapphire', one of his nudes in interiors, before she began reading. "'Thirty-seven naked women adorn the walls of the Spittal Gallery in Cambridge, all bearing the names of precious or semi-precious stones. Thirty-seven paintings of thirty-seven different women. Where does Bony Adams source all his models, or do they source him?'" It goes on to hint that you bedded all the women to get their pictures. If Sylvie left in seventy-nine, you must have had a different woman every night for months!'

He gave her a sheepish grin. 'Is this what you want in your *Vite* – a few tit bits of salacious detail?' She fixed the camera on him. 'Well, sorry to burst your bubble, kid, but those paintings were all taken from magazines, mostly porn magazines and some underwear catalogues. There are only a couple of women I actually *knew*. There's a few famous faces in there, too, though the press never picked that up. When we get back to

the studio, I'll show you. Botticelli's Venus, for one. And Mona Lisa. No one even picked up on the young Queen Liz!

Sam put down her camera, she looked amused, if any emotion at all could be detected in that smoothly made up face. 'Really? No, I hadn't realised at all.'

'I suppose you could call it my homage to the British Pop scene. Richard Hamilton, eat your heart out!'

'So, only a couple of the women were ones you actually slept ...'

He tapped the side of his nose, laughing. 'Oh, that would be telling, and I don't want to bring any lady's virtue into question ...'

She smiled but her knuckles were white, clutching onto the camera. 'There must have been someone, though ... You were a young man –'

'With a child to care for, a career to pursue. Any women, well, they were background colour. There was never going to be anyone serious after Sylvie.' He stilled his shaking hand under the table. Another headache was beginning to take hold, they were more frequent these days. He wondered whether the sensi was to blame. Maybe he should ease off for a while. Of course, there had been women, but no one that stood out. And the thought of taking anyone home to Chrissie ... Out of the question.

'So, life for you resumed as usual. Your work took centre stage.' Sam's statement hung between them. He stacked his empty cup on his plate. She was waiting for him to reveal the key to his work, his soul. Despite himself, he felt a small thrill of flattery. He smiled benignly into the expectant camera. This was her work; her *magnum opus* and he was her muse.

'I guess so.' He held up his wallet to the Spanish woman. 'Though Chrissie – my son – he needed me, too. He needs me still.'

'The murder. I heard it on the news.' She put the camera down and looked up as the Spanish woman brought the bill over. As he paid, she took a small vanity mirror from her back and touched up her lipstick. For a moment, he was full of pity for this woman, this young and beautiful woman with intelligence and, if Humph was to be believed, a good future ahead of her. Why did she need to cover her face so thickly with paint?

‘My daughter in law was a pretty special woman. Why anyone would want to kill her is beyond me.’

‘We all have our enemies.’ Sam was more doll-like than ever, illuminated by a sudden flash of sunlight, as she fastened her coat. ‘The trick is to learn to recognise them.’

‘I can’t believe you have many enemies,’ he said, holding the door open for her. ‘Young thing like you, whole life ahead. You got a boyfriend?’

‘No.’

‘I see.’ They were now outside again, walking along the Gibbetroyd Road. Freezing rain spluttered down, despite the sunshine. ‘That’s a shame ...’ He glanced across her and saw her features were closed. It was okay for him to expose his life to her, but not for her to reveal even the tiniest of details. Maybe he’d roll her a humdinger when they got back to the studio, bring down the defences. It was years since he’d touched a woman, but if Sam made his arms ache to hold her, it was not for lust’s sake, but to comfort her. To protect her. Maybe, for old time’s sake and to give her a hint about his work, he’d get her to strip off and pose for him. An idle fantasy he knew he’d never see through, but an alluring one all the same.

## Rawton Bridge novelist wins major literary prize

*Continued From Page 24*

Prize for fiction has long been esteemed in literary circles. Ms Adams, pictured here with her father-in-law, Bony, says, 'This is a defining moment for me. Everything I have been working towards seems to be happening. I have never been so proud and happy.' She will be signing copies of *On Angel's Wings* on Saturday 6th October at the Rawton Bridge Bookshop on Marketgate.



Ms Bony Adams said last year that Cathy 'is the daughter I never had.'

Plate 22



## Chris

The town hall clock emitted its dismal chime; eleven in the morning and remnants of shadow still clung to the damp streets. During the winter months night was never far away in Rawton Bridge. Chris began to walk, aimlessly at first, then with more purpose as to the left and right, two familiar old chimneys appeared out of the mist like the towers of some fantasy film castles; the rival mills, Thomas's Undercliffe Mill to the north, Lye's to the south, looming grimly in their perpetual duel across the swollen river. Once, nearly everyone in the valley, including himself, would have worked in one of them, their lives tuned to the call of the klaxon. Now just ruins remained, decayed and useless as two elderly prize fighters. A familiar chant drifted from the school playground, an old skipping song from his own schooldays. The song was lost beneath the clang of the school bell before he was able to grasp its significance.

He'd had to get out of the flat after the message from Alex Wadsworth. Her voice on the answerphone had been unequivocal: 'You killed Cathy and we both know why. Tell the police before someone else does.' He shoved his fists down in his pocket. If she turned up in the street now, he wouldn't be responsible for his behaviour. Who the hell did she think she was, blaming him? Weren't the police more likely to think it was her; after all, she was, in Jake's parlance, the 'weirdo', the loner living up on the hill with only her horses for company? He'd done nothing but love his wife. And he had proof of Alex's violence; physical proof in the shape of a long crescent shaped scar down his left calf.

A warm evening in September 2011. Cathy had been out all day, he had no idea where. She'd given Jake a lift to school then driven off somewhere, not returning till after eight that evening. This was the third time in two weeks he'd had to make do with a meal cobbled together from the contents of the fridge. It wasn't that he minded cooking, quite the reverse, but she always liked to do it and he'd let her, appraising her attempts at new recipes like a restaurant critic. Not recently, though. Recently even opening a packet of frozen peas had been a cause of resentment.

When she finally breezed into the living room, where he and Jake were sitting on the sofa watching the local news, he sensed something different about her, something abandoned. Maybe it was the smell of fresh air, heather and wine in her hair, or her jaw set so defiantly.

‘Where’ve you been, Kitten-cat?’ he asked as she bent to kiss Jake.

‘Out and about.’ Her voice was light, he thought, mocking. ‘And you, Chris ... Where have you been?’ Had it been his imagination or was there a post coital glow to her cheeks?

He glared at the TV. ‘I’ve been writing.’ He was lying. He’d been looking through his Masters’ research as he often did, refamiliarizing himself with the turn of phrase, the structure of each paragraph. ‘In fact, I was going to ask if you’d proofread my chapter on Elijah Thomas’s marriage to Anne for me tomorrow.’ This was an on-the-spot decision. The chapter was nowhere near finished.

‘I see.’ She stood up and he noticed a necklace he’d never seen before. A leather thong with some kind of crystal hanging from it, half tucked down into her shirt. What was she hiding from him? ‘Can’t it wait? I’m planning to catch up on those proofs my publisher sent through and anyway, I’ve found out something that may well be the answer to your prayers.’

He’d laughed then to disguise his annoyance. She was, of course, referring to the proofs of the novel she had written using his research. His response had been unnecessarily peevish. ‘I can’t imagine it is that exciting. Good luck with your proofs, Kitten. I’m surprised they took the book in its current state. I think it’s at least two edits off.’

‘Mum, is there anything for tea?’ Jake had said, a whine of complaint in his voice. Cathy looked at both of them, from one to the other, put her hands to her head and emitted a shrill scream.

‘There is a whole freezer full of food that requires little more than shoving in the oven on the right temperature and yet neither of you – a grown adult male and a teenager of thirteen can manage to remove some shrink wrap and fiddle with a knob. She stomped out of the room and he heard her slam shut the door to the bathroom and turn on the shower.

‘What’s rattled mum’s cage?’ Jake had asked, and he had shrugged.

‘Time of the month?’

Later, when Jake was in bed, he’d snuggled up to her on the sofa where she was on her second glass of red. ‘Where did you go today?’ he’d asked.

She stiffened. ‘I went out.’ She looked at her nails, a habit of hers when she was being evasive. ‘Into town and then for a walk, with a woman I met a while back. Alex Wadsworth; you might know her, she’s from round here, like you. She owns the stud farm up at Balden. We went up to the Witches and looked at the sky.’

‘Alex Wadsworth is a lesbian.’ He stared at Jake’s school photo on the wall, taken a couple of years earlier during his first year at high school. It had always annoyed him that the photographer hadn’t cropped the image so that Jake was central. He was too much to the left. ‘She was in the year below me at Caworth school. You need to be careful with her – I’ve heard she likes married women; all the fun with no chance of commitment.’ This was a lie. At school Alex had been subject to the usual sort of taunts a girl who liked football in the 1980s would attract, but her life afterwards was a mystery. He changed the subject. ‘So, you’ll be okay to do a bit of proofing, tomorrow?’

She moved away from him on the sofa. Her earlier annoyance returning with a vengeance. ‘I am trying to finish my book. And then I’ll be ironing Jake’s uniform and going out. Perhaps with a predatory lesbian who appreciates me as a person rather than a slave.’ Her tone was ice cold.

He took a deep breath. ‘I’m asking you to do a two-second job. It’s not like I ask much from you.’ Maybe he’d overstepped the mark with that comment, but he hadn’t been prepared for her overreaction.

‘Fuck you! You do nothing but fiddle around with your Victoriana, altering a comma there, moving a page here. You have turned into a Casaubon, Chris. But I am damned if I’m going to be your Dorothea –’

‘And I have edited your amateur attempts at novel writing,’ he had reminded, trying to control the tic that had started in his eye. Didn’t she realise all he did for her? The number of times he’d picked up faulty grammar, tense slips and other childish errors didn’t bear thinking about.

‘Editing?’ She held up her glass and looked as though she was about to drink from it, thought better of it and threw it all over him. ‘Do you know what, Chris, why didn’t you just marry some little woman who was happy to stay in the house, barefoot and preg ... Editing! You arrogant fucking prick. I am going to bed.’

There was only one person to blame, of course: Alex Wadsworth, the new ‘friend’ who was making him feel like a stranger in his own marriage. What could be the draw? The Wadsworths were long-standing in Rawton Bridge; some of the dour paintings of mayors and counsellors in the council chamber bore the name. And they had plenty of money. Maybe that was it? He clenched his fists tightly. All this time, things had been good between he and Cathy. Here, in Rawton, she was able to focus on what mattered. It couldn’t be spoiled by Alex Wadsworth.

The following day was bright, the late summer sun warm on his back. The quickest route to Balden was on foot, taking the ancient packhorse path over Lye’s Hill up to the stud farm where Alex lived and worked. He loved the old stones, worn smooth by centuries of hooves and human feet, the bumpy road taken by the weavers’ merchants carrying kersey – a coarse woollen cloth for which the area was famed until industrialisation – strapped to mules. They would be bound for the cloth exchange in Blackstone or further afield. Such packhorse tracks were overgrown now, rocky scars across fields and moorland, but it was still possible to navigate between hamlets, villages and towns using them if you knew where to look.

Alex was out in a paddock with two horses when he arrived at the farm. He didn’t know much about horses. He’d admired them from afar, respected their contribution to history, but never learned to ride.

Even from half a mile away, it was clear she hadn’t changed much since Caworth. A tall and angular woman with a determined stride, every movement spoke of a controlled power; only the greying hair betrayed her age

‘Hello!’ Alex shouted when he waved from the gate. She beckoned him to enter the field. ‘Just make your way slowly and they’ll not bother you.’

He almost turned back then. He hadn't expected to be in such close proximity to the animals. He opened the gate and began to walk tentatively into the centre of the field. Sweat made his shirt stick to his back.

'Hi!' He lifted his arm in greeting. Alex was still some way off. 'Can we talk?'

'Sure, I'm just about to take Count Curacao here back to the stables. He is up for sale and we've got a potential buyer coming later.' She indicated the larger of the horses, a chestnut that gleamed with health in the autumn sunshine. 'He's a Warmblood. Beautiful, isn't he?'

Chris nodded, glad the beast was a good ten metres away. The horse was sniffing the air in interest. Alex took something from her pocket and it sidled towards her to eat from her hand. She threw a collar around its neck, all the time talking and patting his flanks. Once it was secure, he moved nearer, gaining confidence now the huge horse was safely tethered.

'I ... wanted to talk to you about Cathy,'

'He still gets giddy, does the Count. Needs keeping in check. But Delilah over there is good as gold. I'm taking the Count back to his stable. You're a beautiful boy, aren't you?' A gust of wind billowed Chris's jacket and took his breath. For a moment he wondered if she was addressing the horse.

'Alex ...' he began, but she had turned and was leading the horse to the gate on the opposite side of the field. Woman and horse were a fine sight against the valley backdrop, with the trees already rusting, the heather casting a purple hue over the moorlands, Rawton Bridge, in the distance, the mill chimneys almost like spires on some fairy-tale castle.

'So, what was it you wanted to talk about?' she shouted over her shoulder. Chris hurried to keep up.

'I'm here about Cath ... Catherine,' he said. He was now at Alex's side; she and the horse smelled sweet, of hay and outdoors, though he was acutely aware of the brutal power of the animal under her command.

'I was wondering if you'd come.' She was laughing at him. He could hear it in her voice. 'Cathy said you'd be interested in my perspective. Come on, we'll start walking back.'

‘I ... It’s just that she needs to be at home ... Working. On her novel.’ It sounded lame even to his own ears.

‘Oh, that’s okay, I wasn’t expecting her.’

They had reached at the gate and she waited for him to open it. Above, the last of the swallows were wheeling, ready to take off for warmer climes.

‘You see, she needs time, a lot of time, to concentrate on her work.’ He gripped the gate tightly. He couldn’t *think*. It was hard talking like this, the sun beating down, the huge horse in her grasp. The pressure of his anxiety making him sweat. ‘And all this ... going out,’ he gasped. ‘I just –’

‘Move out of the way,’ Alex said. ‘We need to get through.’ He yanked at the gate, but it was old, one of the hinges had dropped and it dragged on the ground.

‘Lift it up!’

He lifted and pushed. Once there was enough room for the horse to pass through, he stopped and turned to Alex. ‘Look. I know you two are friends but you –’

It all happened so quickly and yet in slow motion. The horse was too close to him, so close that its muscular body towered above him so close he could see the pulse throbbing beneath its gleaming flanks. Chris jerked forward and stumbled into a pile of horseshit. He fell to the ground just as the horse began to walk through the gate. One of the hooves caught between Chris’s legs, wedging into his left thigh. He was aware of Alex somewhere nearby, her voice soothing, ‘Come on, boy, come on. Count, boy, back to the stable!’ The horse remained, poised for a moment, almost as though it was enjoying Chris’s agony, before removing its hoof. Chris rolled over on the grass as pain streaked up his thigh.

‘What the hell are you doing down there?’ Alex said. ‘You only had to open the bloody gate. You don’t get in the way of this fellow.’ Patting the horse soothingly, she led it into the road. ‘Just shut the gate and follow on, but for Christ’s sake don’t get in the Count’s path again. He’s easily spooked.’

Chris pulled up the leg of his trousers and saw the damage the horse had done: a horseshoe shaped bruise; his skin was puffing up and already turning blue. He could stand at least, but the effort made his thigh ache. ‘Just ... Just stay away from my wife!’ he muttered.

Alex stared back at him, her eyes narrowed. ‘What? I thought ... Is this what you’re about?’

‘Sh... She needs to work.’ He tried to pull the trouser leg back down again but above the knee, his leg was bruised and painful. ‘She can’t be distracted.’

‘But she *is* working when she’s here. Why, yesterday –’ The Count, obviously hearing the anger in her voice, jerked its head. Chris turned, not prepared for another injury. There was nothing more to say. He limped out of the field, and instead of taking the packhorse track, chose the road down to Rawton Bridge.

Now Cathy was dead, and he was alone and there was nothing he could do about it. He banished all thoughts of Alex Wadsworth and turned into the library. At least here, he was in control. The past was waiting, ready to be rediscovered and re-examined. Ready to be rewritten. The library was a grandly porticoed sandstone building; Elijah Thomas’s name was emblazoned on a large bronze plaque in the main entrance. Save for the inclusion of computers, not much had changed since Chris, aged ten, was given his first library tickets; the same musty old book smell, the polished wooden counters and huge iron radiators cranking a minimal heat through the building. The same air of mystery and awe. In the local history section Chris took out his notebook and found the name, John Brierley. Could this former spinner at Lye’s Mill, Eliza Thomas’s young man and the only person at the time who questioned her whereabouts, help him come closer to the truth about the missing girls? The library staff had not yet got around to digitising the personal accounts of local millworkers – collected by a Mrs Constance Peace for the Church of England Review of 1851 – and so he was obliged to use the microfiche. All those names, all those testimonies! There was only one hard copy of this document, which comprised musings on the condition of the elderly inmates of workhouses as well as a theological debate about unmarried mothers; it was too fragile to be touched, so he was forced to study it in this outmoded form, the white digits fading into the background like wisps of fine weather cloud.

But, as he worked through and the light waned, John Brierley’s name was not to be found. His shoulders slumped. A batch of twenty-five women had come to the end of

their contract and just vaporised. Only rumour and John Brierley's testimony that the girls had never returned to Liverpool backed up the suspicion that something untoward had befallen them. Other than that, one newspaper article, there was nothing to prove that they had been murdered.

A dead end. Was this it, then, his life's work rendered useless? All those notes and findings, documents and cuttings. He remembered the red bicycle his father had bought him as a child, the feel of the cool metal in his hands. For a year he had slept with it in his room, so that no one could take it away. In the day he rode around and around the woods of Cragside searching for something he had lost, something he had yet to articulate. Even now, if he closed his eyes, he could smell the loam of the forest. He had been cycling ever since, round and round, getting nowhere, the stench of decay always in his nostrils.

He hunkered down into his coat and scrolled down the document, finding little that he hadn't already seen. References to Elijah Thomas were few, but those that did exist chronicled his petitions to parliament as part of the Chartist Movement; and his philanthropy in the town of Rawton Bridge was well known. Cathy had never understood this work of his, why he didn't put his energies into finding his mother. But she had never known what it was to have roots that had worked themselves deep into the land in which you lived. His mother had left because she had chosen to. She did not want to be found. The mill girls, he was sure, were taken against their will.

His eyes felt dry and gritty by the time the librarian touched him gently on the shoulder and told him she was about to shut up for the night. The streetlights had come on outside and the library was empty. Two miserable leads were all he had achieved so far. The first, mentioned in the 'Rawton Bridge Broadcaster' celebrated the opening of a 'Grande temple by Elijah Thomas' in Rawton Vale Park'. This was to provide 'a chance for contemplation and solitude for the townspeople'.

'There are a couple of volunteers who keep the library open two evenings a week, but not tonight, I'm afraid,' the librarian said. 'We'll be open in the morning, though. Tennish.'



He acknowledged this with a smile though continued to flick through the documents on the screen. His second lead was more confusing. Another article in the 'Broadcaster' of March 17th, 1851, referred to building work 'being undertaken by Thomas' on 'a new apprentice house', to be situated within the bounds of his mill at Undercliffe Woods'. There was no more information, though he scrolled through several years of newspapers. This was puzzling as the only apprentice house he knew of had been constructed only five years earlier. He studied the article again. What had happened to the original apprentice house? Surely, he didn't need a bigger one. No more staff had been taken on.

'I really need to be going,' the librarian said, with a polite sniff. He looked up and saw her for the first time, as she peered myopically down onto the screen; a middle-aged woman with a home to go to. He began to gather up his notes. 'I used to love that place,' she said suddenly, pointing at the screen. 'That temple in the park. It was toilets when I was young.'

Chris squinted at the small line drawing of a Grecian temple. He had assumed it had been demolished. But the librarian was right. He recognised the outline of the old toilet block. Okay the columns had been removed, and the Olympian frieze over the steps, but the basic building was in exactly the same position. He smiled. The loos may have been a temple of contemplation in the 1850s when they were built, but by the 1990s, they had become a place of drug deals and sexual encounters. They were finally closed down in 2002.

'Do you know,' the librarian went on, leaning over him to switch off the machine, and exuding some floral, powdery smell. 'I used to think it was so romantic. That he built it for his wife. A whole temple. That's love.' She sighed loudly. 'I don't think anyone would do that sort of thing now.'

'His *wife*?' Chris demanded, his heart pounding. 'The temple was built in 1853. His wife, Anne died years earlier, giving birth to their daughter.'

'Really? Well, there's a love poem on the tiles in the ladies. I was always told he'd written it to her. An odd kind of poem, though. We used to joke about it... Now, if I can just get to the —'

‘Wait!’ Chris began to scroll again. There it was, in the article. Why had he missed it? ‘Look, it says it here! “The temple was built in honour of Mr Thomas’s recent marriage”. But it doesn’t say who he married!’

‘Hmm. Should think he had the run of the place, old Elijah Thomas. But you, I’m afraid, have not. Sorry but I really have to lock up.’

‘Please, just another minute!’

‘It’ll all be here tomorrow.’ With that the librarian shut down the machine and ushered Chris out into the rainy winter’s night.

ON ANGELS' WINGS

The white enamel of the bath was cold, the better to mortify her flesh. She half sat, half lay, the words of the old song from her childhood issuing from her mouth in a circular rhythm of grace and plea: *'Se lo dò al lupo bianco, Se lo tiene tanto tanto, Ninna nanna nanna fate ...'*

She lay back, pulled up her petticoat, and opened her legs wide. 'You'll have to do better than that,' Louisa said, looking down on her as though she was some dumb animal. 'Stick your legs over 'side o' bath. Come on, lass, like this.' She grabbed one of Donatella's ankles. 'That's more like it.' Grasping the needle, she lunged forward. Donatella closed her eyes, feeling it jab inside her womb. The pain was instant and searing.

*'Ninna nanna, ninna oh, Questo bimbo a chi lo dò?'* He would never know. He would never find out. The blood began to spill in cloudy swirls; blood and water mixed. She would make a sacrifice of her own flesh in return for her freedom. *'Ninna nanna, ninna oh, Questo bimbo a chi lo dò?'* Blood splashed up the white tiles in the bathroom, onto Louisa's white apron. Louisa pulled out the needle then thrust it in again, in a bizarre parody of lovemaking. *'Se lo dò alla befana, Se lo tiene una settimana ...'*

Back arched, her skin dark against the white of the bath, Donatella knew the deed was done. Her child was dead. She was free.

'When you're ready, Ma'am.' Any pretence at intimacy fell away and Louisa was once again The Missus. 'I'll get the mess cleared and you into bed. You'll be right as rain come morning after a night's rest.'

'Will I?' she gripped the side of the bath now streaked red. Would this pain ever stop?

'You're young and you're healthy. No reason why not, though you make sure to keep the Master away for a week or so till you heal.'

Donatella struggled to a sitting position and pulled her gown down to cover her nakedness. 'The ... The Master, he can never know.,' she whispered.

'As I said last night. You can count on my discretion, Ma'am. Cal's brought a deer in, shot in't woods by poachers. It'll cover this ...' She held

## **Bony**

Bony was up early the following morning, awoken by howling gales thrashing the trees in Undercliff woods. His bones creaked as he opened the studio door. Yesterday's trip into his past with Sam had proved exhausting; his head was throbbing by the time she left at six and today he didn't feel much better, though that could be down to the weather and the two humdingers he washed down with a glass or two of scotch before hitting the sack. Now, at first light, the rain was bad, and water was beginning to seep into the kitchen. Yesterday's reprieve had been short lived. He had been up early sandbagging all the doors.

The garden was a swamp and walking difficult with his boots being sucked into muddy ground. He stopped in the middle of the sodden lawn, breathless suddenly, and looked up the stony donkey track leading to Cragside. The rocks lowered down and at the edge of the track, the hawthorn and old oak reached spindly arms over the tumbledown stone walls; skeletons grabbing at the living. All was monochrome. Grey sky, grey land, deepening to black. The rain pelted down on his uncovered head, a dirty mix of half ice, half water, dripping down the neck of his shirt. He shuddered. Man, but it was depressing. The crag itself was almost enveloped in cloud, cloud in which streaks of a bluer, steelier nature were forming. The sky seemed weightier than the land, a massive physical presence hanging precariously. He thought of his painting, the red bleeding through the rock. This was power, a surging, elemental power against which he, a mere human, was nothing.

He was just finishing the task of dragging the final sandbag over to the kitchen door when Sam manoeuvred her little lilac fiat through into the drive. He gave a warning sign for her to park nearer the road. If she drove too near the house, she would never get the wheels, built for dodging Italian traffic jams, out of the Yorkshire mud. He noticed her legs as she climbed out; they were very thin in their black tights, like sticks of liquorice. Even with her red coat on, she looked undernourished. Again, he knew that disconcerting need to protect her. The determined crash with which she slammed the car door shut, however, hinted that her frail appearance disguised an underlying strength.

‘I’ve been thinking,’ she said as he ushered her into the house. ‘It would be good for you to talk through some of your paintings with me – and how your life impacted on subject and technique. One of the things I am trying to get across is that art produced by any particular person is a result of their life experiences; the smallest event can create an artist’s signature style ...’

‘They’re mostly in the cellar,’ Bony said, his heart sinking. Jeez, it was probably a good idea to check out the cellar to make sure the water wasn’t coming in. ‘But let’s get you a hot drink first, you look so chill.’

‘I’m okay.’ Sam reached into her bag and pulled out the little camera. ‘I grabbed some coffee at the hotel. Wow, I must say, this house is really something.’ They had entered through the studio door as the kitchen and front doors were both now piled with sandbags. There had only been two real floods since Bony had moved in, but they had caused a lot of damage. This was the penalty of living in the middle of the Pennines; they were always surrounded by water, water that poured from the heavens onto the hill tops, which then became saturated. It would then surge down towards the river at the valley bottom; new springs and tributaries were always appearing, and the air was always damp, even in the summer.

He lit the gas heater and a roar of warmth filled the studio. The glass windows on its three sides might have been good for nurturing oranges when the house was built in the 1850s; in those days a sophisticated underfloor heating system was powered by a furnace outside in what was now a tumbledown knot of sheds – he’d discovered this when the cellar flooded back in 2012. But without the staff to maintain such extravagances, the place was like a fridge most of the year. Sam stood looking at his Crag painting, the camera poised. She certainly didn’t waste any time.

‘So, let’s start here. How come you bought this particular house? It’s massive. You can’t have been all that wealthy back in the early seventies?’

He grinned. ‘You only say that because you’re coming up from London where a shoebox costs more than a year’s mortgage. Here. Sit down. He put on the kettle and while Sam took off her coat and made herself at home, he reminisced. It was the late sixties. He and Sylvie were living down in Camden. They came up to visit an artist

friend, long dead now, who lived in Rawton Bridge. Angel had been one of the first wave of incomers to the town; guys who came without much dough but armed with a desire to create a different kind of life. They'd set up a commune in a row of eighteenth-century weavers' cottages off Wesley Street. It had started as a squat, but the fuzz got heavy. In the end, the guys from the commune negotiated with the owner, some old farmer from Blackstone. He let them have the lot – nine cottages - for a few paintings and thirty pounds. 'The place was on its knees,' Bony remembered. 'The mills had gone down. People were getting outta here.'

'So, you bought this place?'

'Not straight away. Sylvie and me, we were renting a tiny two room flat in Camden that took everything we had. We'd had to sell Sylvie's art from college to pay rent. She was a ceramicist and made cups and plates, things people could use. Angel told us how cheap it was to live up here, pointed out this house when we visited. We loved it, but it cost a little more than the cottages and we just didn't have it. But Lady Luck was smiling down. Within weeks, my painting, *Parade!* sold at the Omo Gallery in New York and we bought the house outright. Sylvie was four months pregnant with Chrissie. It was perfect timing. New house, new baby.'

How quickly it had all unravelled, like a skein of wool split into its strands.

'I'm sorry things didn't turn out so well, with Sylvie leaving and everything. I guess it was tough for you,' Sam said. He looked up at her quickly. She was sitting bolt upright on the sagging old sofa, her hands to the camera downwards pointing, not at him at all. In her face, he could detect some weird karma, some struggle going on inside, light and dark flitting across her features like clouds scudding across the sun. Poor kid. She was lost, somehow. He wondered whether Jake would like her but then remembered that Jake was still mad at him. He hadn't seen him. He could be in the house right now, skulking around somewhere, still angry about the painting of his mother. He should probably go and check.

Sam coughed, and he realised that her last question had gone unanswered. 'It was a tough time back then, but I had plenty to keep me occupied. The house was a wreck when we bought it. Buildings here are constantly battling the elements. It cost everything we

had to make it fit to live in.’ Now, Cragside had changed again. A storm was raging, high up on the moor. Swirls of white obliterated the rocks, smothering the land. No colour, no contrast. They could be on the edge of the world in the warm bubble of the studio.

She gave a clipped little laugh. The camera was back in place again. He took up his brush.

‘Bony, let’s talk about the time after Sylvie left. How did you manage with Chris? Was he broken-hearted, a young kid like that –’

‘He was ...’ As always, the images of Chrissie as a child refused to come. Only one, like a video on repeat: that stern little face of his as he cycled round.

‘But you loved him, right? You never regretted he’d been born?’ What a question.

‘Regret? Why would I, he’s my son. Of course, I loved him.’ Chrissie had been a difficult baby, colicky and prone to ear infections; as a child, he was sullen and withdrawn with some odd habits. ‘Preternaturally tidy’, one teacher had remarked, showing him Chrissie’s exercise books, all neatly colour indexed. Bony picked up his palette knife, wiped a thick globule of brown from it with a rag. The adult Chrissie was even more of an oddball. How Cathy had put up with him, he could never fathom.

As he awaited the next question, he took up a clean hoghair paintbrush and sculpted the tip to a point with his teeth. The painting was blossoming, the Crag emerging from the mass of dark and light in all its hellfire and glory, yet there was still a balance to be found, some heft to add to the right of the painting, some to be scraped back from the left. He took his palette knife and dragged it down the side of the rock; the thick ochre sky curled off the canvas like butter from bread, exposing some paler, thinner atmosphere and a hint of Ruby’s shoulder. He recognised the sweep of her clavicle in the edge of a cloud. Silence but for the slow tick of the old railway clock, the cracking of the studio as it warmed. He could feel the pulse of the hills outside, the living land.

‘It must feel especially hard for your son.’ Sam’s insistent voice broke through his reverie. ‘To lose his mother and now Cathy, his wife, in such tragic circumstances.’

‘Yeah, it’s pretty bad.’ He thinned the ochre with some linseed oil and applied it to the right of the crag, building up the sky so that its intensity matched some of the dark

matter at the base of the rocks. He didn't want to go there, about Cathy. It was all too new, too raw. Cathy, his daughter-in law had been murdered, Sylvie, his wife, had vanished. What was it about the women in this family; why did they have to be taken away? Sam stood up, the camera to her eye, focussing down on his hands as he mixed paint, as he built and scraped, adding a touch of titanium white here, a streak of umber. She brought the lens up to the painting itself, lingering on the section he was working.

Sam moved closer with the camera. 'Okay, let's skip a few years. Your work during the seventies is all pretty well documented and I know your son was sent away to school after Sylvie went.'

'Yeah.' He hadn't felt good about packing the kid off like that the following September, but there was nothing else he could have done. Coldwater House was no place for a boy on his own while his father painted. And he couldn't have managed the school run every morning, traipsing across the valley to Underbank Infants and Juniors, going to sports days; everyone knowing about Sylvie. Caworth School was only five miles away so at least he could come home at weekends. And it was a popular choice in the valley for busy parents. Being sent away hadn't done Bony any harm, but sometimes he wondered whether boarding school had been one of the things that sent Chris over the edge. The truth was that Chris didn't spend many weekends at home. He was left at Caworth while Bony worked on. It freaked him out, looking at his son's peaked little face every day ... Maybe it had been a mistake.

'And did it upset him,' she circled him, the camera's red light irritating his retina as it swooped, 'not being home with his dad. And then meeting your other girlfriends?'

The rain battered on the roof and Bony was glad of the heater. They'd written a load of garbage about him in the seventies. For him to have flown around the world bedding all the models and actresses the papers claimed, he would never have been at home here in Rawton Bridge, preparing for the shows he put on in London and New York, Madrid. Anyway, he'd been hit harder than a sledgehammer by Sylvie's leaving; for years afterwards, he had adopted a 'look but don't touch' policy. But the papers had enjoyed the tales of his sexual conquests and continued to print them whether they were true or



not. Sometimes he suspected Humph, his agent back then, of manufacturing them to sell his nudes.

Maybe Sam had a handle on this already as after a pause in which the only sound was the rasp of canvas beneath his brush, she went on: ‘And what else were you doing at this time? I’ve read that you were asked to lecture at some universities, you became quite in demand during the late seventies, early eighties. Didn’t Burnside give you an honorary doctorate?’

‘Kid, it was over thirty-five years ago. Not my most productive time ...’ The whole era was a downer. Yeah, the university had given him the accolade, for which he had to sit on a committee and deliver the odd free lecture but this had been something of a poisoned chalice. Teaching was not his thing. He’d only ever wanted to paint; it was what he’d been born for. He’d worked obsessively to try and forget Sylvie, not that the papers would let him. She became a cause celebre and sightings of her were reported all over the globe: ‘Artist’s muse seen in Madrid’ or Calais or San Francisco. He had ignored it all and continued to paint to ward off the loneliness and to keep his house from falling down. It was hard when his kind of art was beginning to be seen as outmoded. Pop, that empty-hearted younger brother of true art, had won.

The camera and Sam came ever nearer. ‘You taught in Burnside University from 1977 until 1982,’ she said. ‘Around the time Sylvie left, and you produced the *Nudes in Interiors*. You lectured there for a while and gave some private tuition to especially talented students.’

He thought back. Jeez, just what did she want from him? That time had all been frenetic. Work and Chrissie and the guilt. ‘Maybe. I can’t remember. I was asked to do those termly lectures. As I said, it was years ago when I was still in demand.’ Before the advertisers had begun using him as a symbol of everything that was outdated and pointless; the money that kept him, these days, came mostly from royalties from an ‘ironic’ aftershave ad where an old hippy hummed along to Neil Young’s ‘Hurricane’ and admired one of Bony Adams’ paintings in a junk shop. Humph said at least it kept him in the public eye. He screwed up his eyes, critically viewed his last smear of paint. That

touch of cobalt, just running down the edge of the rocks to the right worked well against the cadmium red streaking the sky. But more blue was needed, for balance and harmony.

‘You gave a lecture called Flesh Colour. All about how to create the illusion of skin with paint,’ Sam said.

He took one of his largest palette knives; it was two inches across the top edge and ripped it along the length of the crag to make a jagged cut that caught the light, gave a three-dimensional aspect to the rock. He felt like a magician. Painting was all about surface, illusion. Once more, the land was breathing in his hands.

‘You wanted a model, do you remember? A “willing victim”, you said, to offer up her flesh to the “god of art”.’

The paint removed by the knife oozed from its end. He slapped it across the foreground, that still sketchy section of the hillside taken up with sparse trees. A power surged through him. This was what musicians must feel, he thought, or composers as they arranged their notes to perfection. Holding a brush upside down, he scored down, using the sharp tip of the wooden handle, scratching into the foreground to approximate the spiky forms of winter trees. The studio was warm now; he relaxed, closed his eyes and thought of Cragside as the sun set on an autumn afternoon –

‘Bony, do you remember a young woman, name of Ailsa. Dark hair, white skin. You said she looked like Snow White. Do you remember asking her to strip off for the class so that you could examine the tones of her flesh?’

Sam’s words drifted over him, floating, dislocated. As she spoke the word *flesh*, he saw, in his mind’s eye the peachy hue caught on the tip of some branches as the sun plummeted beyond the crag, like a halo of golden down on a youthful arm. The scene was pulling him, more seductive than any woman. He opened his eyes, shocked by the ethereal brightness of the sky outside, the translucence of rain, the roar of the storm. He slid his index finger down into the dark bushes in his painting, felt the greasy texture of the paint, the score marks of his brushes. He used his nail to rip into the older paint that had almost dried, exposing the vestiges of Ruby lying beneath the land; it was right that she should remain there.

‘She took off all her clothes, down to her pants and bra and you made her stand in front of the class while you stroked her body, pointing out some colour here, some there. She remembered the cobalt especially. Cobalt eyes, you said, but also running down the inside length of her thigh.’

He threw down his brush. The kid was beginning to get under his skin. Okay she wanted to get her *Vite* done and include him in the annals, but jeez, did she have to question him like this about events so very many years ago. A particularly strong gust of wind rattled the panels in the roof. He could see the bare branches of the trees outside waving frantically, as though they were trying to tell him something. A solid object thudded against the glass and he realised that a branch had broken. Now it was rolling about the roof like a sleepless child. He turned angrily to her, but then softened. She was working, that was all. This was her passion. He’d had a lifetime to indulge his own and she needed a break.

‘Kid, I can’t recall that far back. It was something I did, then. A gimmick. The students loved it.’

‘You lifted her right arm, showed the other students her underarm hair. You said it was umber. Burnt umber. Then you pulled the strap of her bra, exposing her right breast to the class. You said her skin there was creamy, a hint of madder at the nipple. All this in front of the other students. Her peers!’ The camera was shaking. Sam was upset but he couldn’t see why, not yet. What he did in the eighties, in the seventies, sixties, fifties; man, it was all over now. Lost to time. He couldn’t remember any particular girl he had played this trick on. It was, though, a favourite of his and it worked. Nothing to focus the eyes of art students like a lesson in living colour. How better to demonstrate that tones, shades, and the intensity of light changed with the most nuanced of movements. Just as Sam’s face, now she let the camera slip a little, had clouded over. With the darkness of the storm outside, it appeared livid with shades of blue. Cobalt here, too, alongside more disturbing colours, purples, a flickering rage of vermilion. He began to move towards her.

‘Kid, we are all walking palettes. Your skin now –’

‘It wasn’t like Ailsa minded. Not really. She thought you had singled her out, made her special. She was nineteen, Bony. Just nineteen. And later, you went with a crowd of the students to the pub nearby – the Swan, or Mucky Duck as it was known. You chose to sit near Ailsa, bought her pints of cider. You said you were *enchanted* by her.’ The camera was back in place again, firmly fixed on his face. He stared into it, trying to understand her intensity, to bring the girl called Ailsa to mind but there were many girls back then, all earnestly wanting to be artists.

‘Ailsa had a tiny bedsit on the outside of town. You walked her home and –’

Now he remembered. A beauty, Ailsa had been. Tall, icy features as though nothing could touch her. But there had been a crazy vulnerability about her too. He remembered the way she flattened herself against the wall outside the pub when he kissed her first time, her narrow hips jutting into his own.

‘She was nineteen, Bony. You were forty. She said that afterwards you told her that her skin turned to honey in the light of her lamp. It was summer 1979. You saw her three more times ...’ Sam waited for the memory to return. The storm raged on, the branch on the roof rolling around as though in some kind of agony. Or ecstasy. The clock ticked. He picked up his palette knife, scored again to the heart of the rock. This time, a woman’s chin emerged, its angle defiant yet defenceless, exposed as though waiting to take a punch. His hand began to tremble. The camera whirled, recording, collecting the *Vite* of Bony Adams.

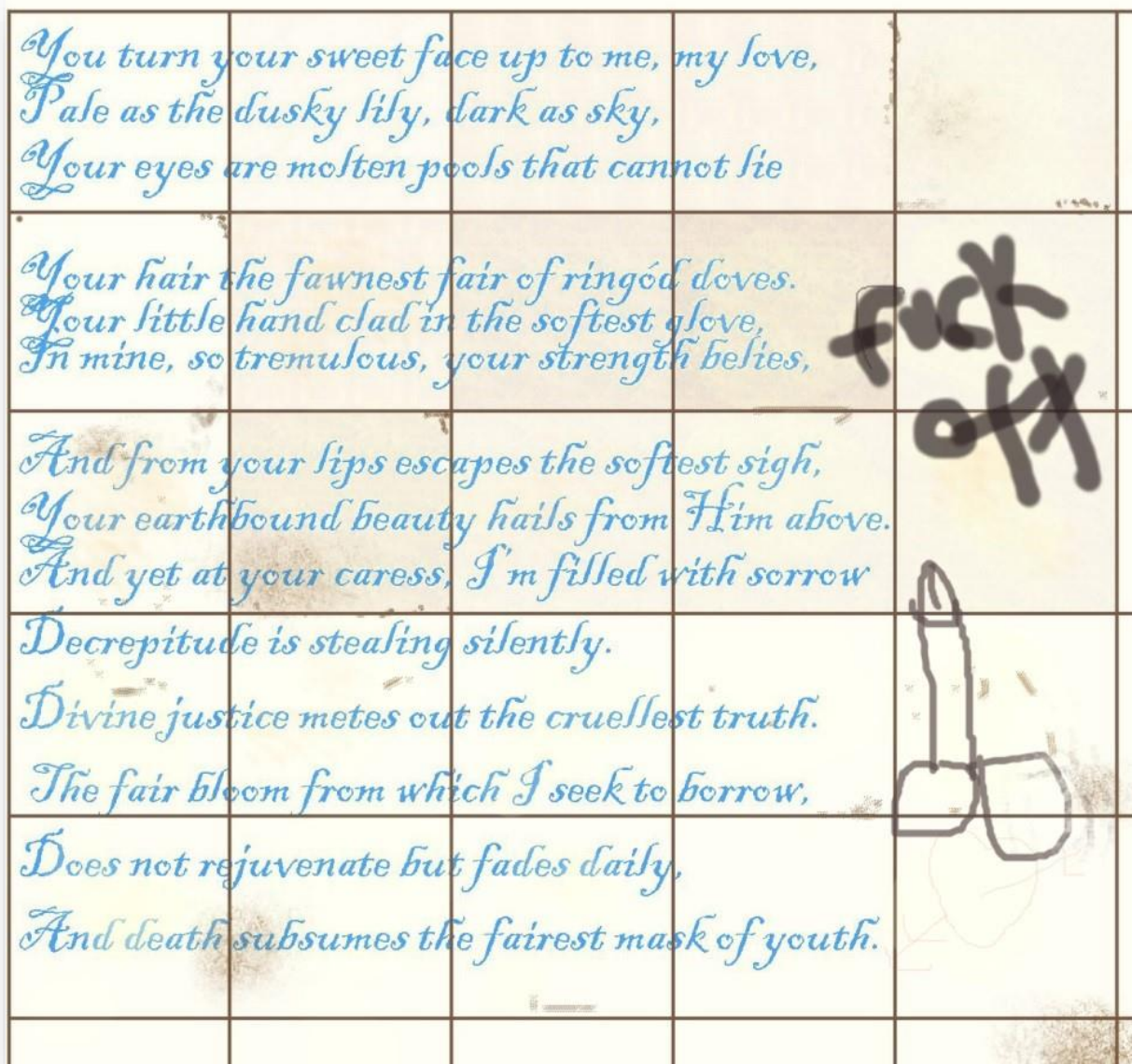


Plate 24

## **Jake**

Jake stuffed his few belongings into a small leather suitcase that he'd found propping up a limbless shop dummy. It was better than the bin bag his dad had used. He'd got back to Bony's after leaving Maddie's and crawled straight to bed where he crashed out, waking in the same position he'd gone to sleep. It was nearly dark now, still raining, and the wind outside was whistling through the window panes, moaning down the chimney. But he didn't care. He couldn't stay with Bony, and not just because of the pervy painting, but because he needed to be on his own. It wasn't as though they ever did anything together anyway. All these years, living in the same town and he had never even stayed with him before now.

He would go home and then maybe he would take off, to another city or overseas. There was enough money in his account to pay for him to get somewhere and there was nothing left in Rawton Bridge to hold him. Maddie wouldn't look at him now.

He took a last look around the room, at his grandfather's mandala drawings on the walls, a nude portrait of some woman in dark browns and black, and the other random stuff, heaped up: plastercasts, old clocks, bits of pottery, books and clothes. He snapped off the light and darkness fell. It was later than he'd thought. He picked up the case and made his way downstairs, deciding that if he met his grandfather on the way out, he would not give an explanation.

A woman in a red coat was standing in the hall. She was holding a camera and looked kind of lost, staring at the door to the studio like she didn't know whether she was coming in or leaving.

'Hi,' he said, brushing past her to the door. 'And bye.'

She gave a weird kind of half smile. 'You must be ... Chris's son. Jake?' She was not from round here. South, he reckoned. Posh.

He stopped for a moment. 'Yup?'

'Just ... well, yeah, hi!'

He turned back and saw that she had been crying. Her eyes were wet and black stuff was tricking down her cheeks. Her lipstick looked like it had been half wiped off and smeared upwards on one side of her mouth like The Joker from *Batman*. Only she was obviously upset. He was reminded for a moment of Maddie, the way she looked when he told her about hitting his mum. 'You okay?'

She nodded. 'I'm just on my way. I've been interviewing your grandfather about his life. He might have mentioned me, I'm –'

'And he made you cry?' Jake felt a rush of sympathy. Just what had the old fart done now?

'– Sam. I'm –'

'Hi, Sam.' The hallway was dark and cluttered. It was embarrassing to be stuck there so close to her. 'Sorry, I'm just, like, going now. Back to my house.' He opened the front door and the wind opened it wider. Outside everything was moving, like the whole hillside was going to blow away.

'If you're going down to town, maybe I can give you a lift?' She touched his elbow like she was sorry for him. He recoiled.

'Nah. It's okay.'

'Look, I insist.' He saw that she already had her car keys in her hand. 'The rain's awful. How far are you going?'

'Other side of the valley?'

'I'll take you. I can't let you walk on a night like this.'

He smiled tightly. Would she be so keen to offer, he wondered, if she knew what he had done to his mum? His fingers curled around his mobile phone. Usually, Maddie would have sent a message by now. Nothing.

He followed Sam out into the storm. She was stupidly dressed for the weather. That red coat was made from some expensive but thin fabric. But she was obviously from somewhere warmer, softer, and didn't know better. Her shoes, little pump things that would be no good in the kind of mud you got in Rawton Bridge, were about as much use as a chocolate teapot, his Mum would say. Dad had bought her one at Christmas one year.

An actual chocolate teapot. She'd called it his self-portrait. He'd been pissed off at that, though it was good when they melted it and all dipped strawberries in for pudding.

Sam's car was freezing, the seats clammy. It was a Fiat like his mum had once owned, when he was small. He could just remember, the 'biscuit tin on wheels', she called it. As soon as the door shut, everything began to steam up. It was embarrassing, a tight squeeze, the both of them in there. And he didn't even know who she was, apart from her name. She started fiddling with the ignition and the car burst into life.

'The heater will soon warm us up,' she said, wiping down the inside of the windscreen with a cloth. 'We'll just wait a mo. Oh my god – what's that?'

From out of nowhere, a hand clawed at her window. She jumped back in her seat, moved closer to Jake so she was almost on top of him. The claw became a fist. Someone was trying to get in.

'Shit, drive!' he said. What the fuck was that?

'Sam,' the voice was half a moan, half a strangled cry. 'Come back. I didn't know, I swear –'

She pulled off the handbrake, stepped up the gas. The car shot forwards, narrowly missing the tree at the side of the gatepost. Jake looked back. The figure was staggering after the car, like some kind of zombie movie freak. It was Bony. In seconds, she had manoeuvred the car through the gates and was half skidding in the wet, braking down the hill to town. She turned on the radio and some old eighties music blared out, The Human League's 'Don't You Want Me': he remembered his mum playing it. 'It's only my Grampa. What's going on?' Jake demanded. 'Why are you running away from him?'

'He'll tell you himself soon enough,' Sam said, her eyes fixed firmly ahead. There were no streetlights on this narrow track and it was kinda freaky trying to see through the rain and night if you didn't know what you were doing.

Jake pulled a packet of chewing gum from his pocket. 'Well, I'm sorry he made you cry.' The painting of his mother came into his mind. Perhaps Bony really was a perv. 'He didn't like, make a pass at you, did he?'

Sam made a choking kind of noise that he realised was her laughing. He offered her a chewing gum and she took one, popping it into her mouth between giggles. 'Christ, no.



That would have been more than I could stomach. ‘No, it was me that gave him a fright more than anything.’

‘Okay.’ He stared ahead, watching the blobs of light that made up the windows and streetlights of Rawton Bridge come into sharper focus and they neared the town. He thought of the painting of his mother. He didn’t give a toss what was going on with Grampa. He pointed up Chisworth Road, to his house. ‘I live up there. The warmer side of the valley.’ She bumped the car along the track, and they fell into the kind of silence you only usually get with someone you know really well. He liked this Sam, he decided, whatever she had done to make his grandfather act like a horror movie extra.

They drew up at the house and she pulled the handbrake on. He peered into the darkness of the drive and his hands began to shake again. Maybe it wasn’t such a good idea, coming here at night on his own. Maybe he should have waited till morning. But what would Sam say if he bottled it now? After driving him all the way here, buffeted by the weather, it wouldn’t be fair to ask her to drive him back down to town again. All the same, he wished he didn’t have to get out of the safety and warmth of the car to say goodbye.

‘Th ... thanks,’ he muttered. ‘For the lift. It was kind. I would’ve got soaked.’

‘This is the place, eh?’ she asked, slowly, looking through his window to the house beyond, not that it could be seen beyond the flurries of sleety rain in the cone of light from the headlamps. ‘Where your mother was ...?’

‘Yeah.’ His hand was on the door handle, but he was reluctant to open it.

‘You found her, didn’t you?’

‘Yeah.’ His voice was barely a croak as he thought again of her lying dead in her own bed for a day and a half while he was off his face and going to school. He remembered ripping the scarf away from her stomach and felt sick all over again.

‘You’ll be okay,’ she whispered, patting him on the knee. ‘It’ll get easier. Believe me.’

He stared out into the darkness, knowing he had to go into the house. His house. His mum. He needed to claim them back. Since it had happened, he had run away from the thought of her death and the empty house. He was a coward. ‘How would you know?’

he demanded, knowing he was being rude— but annoyed by her assumption he knew how he felt. It was Robbo at school all over again. Sam sighed and rubbed at her window with the sleeve of her jacket. Jake jerked down the handle of the door, squashing down the sobs that threatened to take him over. ‘The trouble is, I keep seeing my mum, lying there ...’ Why was he even trying to explain?

‘Like I said, you’ll be okay.’ She sounded kind of annoyed now. As though he shouldn’t be upset, shouldn’t be woken in the night by the sudden appearance of his mother in his dreams and have to face all over again the reality of her death. It brought the sting of tears to his eyes. He swung his legs out of the car and turned away.

‘It was good to meet you, Jake.’ She revved the engine, ready to be off.

‘See you around, then.’ He was out of the car.

‘I am sure you will.’ And that was it. The door was shut again, and she was turning back down into town, leaving him alone.

The garden was pitch black and soaking. Without a torch it was almost impossible to see once Sam’s car had roared off down the road. The police must have turned off the security lights which would normally have lit up the path. The rain was still falling from a dark sky, spitting against his cheeks in icy pins. He trudged to the back door, trying to dodge the puddles in the potholes that got worse every winter. It was always one of those things Mum talked about getting done. Up here, the weather was a bit wilder. Mum had always said it was because they lived above the tree line. In the clouds.

He pushed away any thoughts of her and felt under the mat for the key and, glad that his hands were shaking as much from cold as with anything else, put it into the lock. The door opened and a rush of foistiness greeted him. He would have to clean up. He immediately switched on the light in the kitchen and took a deep breath. The first hurdle was over. He was back. He had made it without bottling out. One nil to him. He didn’t think who his opponent might be.

The veg drawer out of the fridge was on the floor, where he had left it with Maddie the other day. The tomatoes and stuff were looking manky. He took a bin bag from the drawer and tipped the contents of the drawer into it, then filled the drawer with water and

washing up liquid. Immediately the kitchen smelled better. He opened the fridge and found a block of cheese, the last two cans of cider and some of the chocolate with ginger his mum loved. Used to love. He took a can and turned his attention to the rest of the room. The tin cupboard was still full of cans and dry food. He could hear his mum, the last time they went to the supermarket, saying that she had to stock up. There was no knowing when the snow would start and last winter they'd been snowed in for a few days. There was also a bag of spuds in the pantry. She always bought a small sack from the guy at the market. He had enough to eat for a while at least, till he decided where to go.

In the front room, he switched on the two lamps as well as the overhead light, then he turned on the TV; some stupid game show blared out, idiots answering questions for prizes. He put on the gas fire. It was something his mum had been proud of, one of those that looked like a real fire with flames. It had been installed during the summer after Dad had left and ever since the weather had started to be a teeny bit chilly, had made sure it was always on when she was in the house, warming the room and looking kind of cheery. He ignored the empty table where the computer had been and the oblong of dust on the shelf where her photo had once stood beside the others, of himself and Dad and her as a baby with her own parents who had been dead for years.

He would have to put on the heating, though, he thought. It must have all been switched off by the police. Back in the kitchen, he found the controls and turned the dial to twenty-four degrees. Immediately, the boiler fired up and he realised that this was one of the sounds of home, solid and comforting. It helped kill the silence. In the freezer, he found a loaf of bread, snapped off a few slices and made himself some cheese on toast under the grill. He hadn't eaten since yesterday. It was funny, but just being home made him feel hungry again. When the cheese began to bubble, he snatched it out and plopped it on the plate. Outside, he could still hear the rain and the wind. He put down the blinds in the kitchen to block out the blackness. He was home. He had made it. He was on his own but okay.

He ate his meal and drank the last two cans of cider lying on the sofa, watching the game show. One couple won a thousand pounds and were in line to try for the car in the next episode. The other couple went home empty handed to the groans of the audience.

He flicked through the channels but there was only bad news, bombings, wars and disease or pointless reality shows. He decided on a discussion about a football match, Fulham v Arsenal and turned up the sound even higher. He needed to use the toilet. The thought of going upstairs in the dark made him nervous again. He was being stupid, he told himself. All he had to do was make sure the lights were on and he'd be fine. Nothing was any different except that his mum had been killed and it wasn't like there was anyone up there now, not his mum, not her killer. He was the only freakin person in the house. His house. The home he now owned.

He took a deep breath and took the stairs in twos. See, there was nothing to be scared of, he told himself through chattering teeth. The black plastic had fallen down from his mum's door, which was slightly open, but he would not look at it. He would go straight into the bathroom and close the door. Tonight, he would sleep downstairs with the comforting sound of the TV. Tomorrow he would come up here and sort out his mum's room. One day soon, he supposed, he would have to go through her clothes, take them to a charity shop or something, but he wouldn't think of that tonight. He made it to the bathroom and shut the door. Last time he had been in here, Maddie had been with him. They'd so nearly done it. Now she wouldn't even answer his messages.

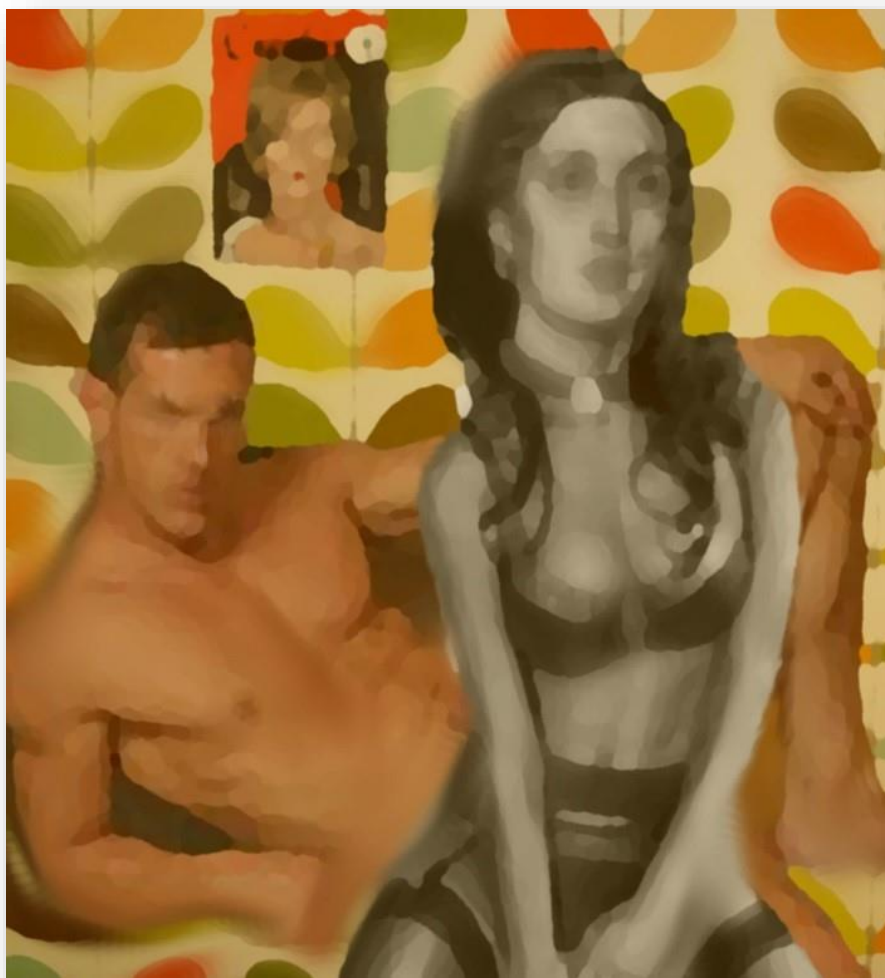
He sat down on the toilet like a kid and closed his eyes as he peed. Why had he told Maddie about hitting his mum? It made him sound like a total headcase. Why had he hit his mum anyway, on her last day on earth?

Something in the house creaked. He opened his eyes, alert once more, but all was silent again but for the crank of pipes. Just the heating warming the place up, he reasoned, pulling up his pants. Nothing to get freaked about. He washed his hands and dried them on the towel and heard it again. A sound like someone turning over in bed. Mum's bed. A sigh. His heart began to hammer. He had never believed in ghosts.

He stood still in the bathroom, every millimetre of his skin prickling. Get a grip, Jakey boy, he almost said aloud. There's no one here. The house has been locked up and only you know where the key is. He flushed the toilet, glad of the rush of noise that smothered any other sounds. He bolted out of the bathroom under cover of this reassurance. On the landing, he stared at his mum's door. Was it open when he came that day with Maddie?

He tried to remember but could only recall the black plastic that was covering it. The plastic had now fallen down, and he could see that it had been held in position by tape so nothing too scary there. Tape wouldn't hold forever and as it was so cold and damp, it probably came down all on its own. He peered into the room, which was dimly lit by the landing light. To get to the switch for his mum's light, he would have to step over the plastic, and he didn't think he had the nerve. He could make out the vague shapes of the furniture: the dressing table, wardrobe and bed, everything quiet and still. He was imagining things like some little kid who'd just seen a scary movie. He was a total nut job.

Shaking his head at his own idiocy, he made for the stairs. Then he heard the banging. Someone was hammering on the front door, smashing the heavy knocker against the wood as though their life depended upon it. What was going on? Who would want to come here now? He stood, poised, unsure of whether to go up or down the stairs. Was it a ghost, his mum's ghost, trying to find a way back home? Had she come to accuse him? He choked back the fear. Should he open the door, confront whoever it was? But what if it was the murderer, the person who'd stabbed his mum in the stomach? As he stood there, paralysed by his own terrified thoughts, the hammering stopped and then started again, more urgently this time. He swallowed, attempted to harness his courage. Whoever wanted to get in was not going to stop banging at the door until he opened it.



Bony Adams *Second Thoughts* 1967. Oil on canvas

## Chris

DI Stephens and Sergeant Jones had been waiting in an unmarked car when Chris arrived back at his flat. Stephens and Jones, like a firm of solicitors ready to undertake some particularly grim business. They must have been there for a while as the car was all steamed up and they jumped out and followed him up to his flat, with, he thought, a sense of relief. Maybe they expected him to do a bunk? As DI Stephens took a seat on the sofa, he noticed the book in her hand. It was the edition with the Victorian stone angels on the cover.

‘This is my own copy,’ she said waving it up like a trophy. ‘I sat up last night and read the whole thing again. Beautiful piece of writing, don’t you think?’

Chris shrugged and looked at the pile of books he had taken out from the library, many of which he had already read but they could bear a second inspection. What did she hope to find in *On Angels’ Wings*; it was only a novel, bastardised history in the service of plot, implausible and inaccurate. The book had been published three years ago. One of those slow burners, it had not at first hit many lists and looked set to sink without trace. He was not surprised. He would read the statistics to Cathy with secret relish: how many books had been published that year, how many were pulped, how the demise of the net book agreement wrecked authors’ careers. Cathy never cared as much as he did. She wore a mantle of confidence he could never hope to adopt. But *On Angels’ Wings* began to sell after a few months. Readers loved it. It was reviewed by a couple of heavyweight newspapers. The publisher got in touch about a new edition, one with readers’ group notes in the back, the edition which Detective Inspector Stephens was waving at him now.

‘Have you read it?’ She held the book up theatrically. Sergeant Jones shook her head.

‘Not my kind of thing, boss.’

Chris was about to complain that this was irrelevant, when the DI launched into a synopsis.

‘It’s about the seventh daughter of an Italian count who marries an English mill owner. He’s full of himself, this Elias, founding parks and giving money to build the local school. Everyone thinks he is wonderful. But his wife, Donatella, starts hearing things in the night, screaming and such. Turns out he is running some kind of paedophile ring; hiring

out these young girls he procures from workhouses to his rich friends. The workhouses actually pay him to take the girls. Some of them are tortured and killed.'

'Bloody hell, Chief,' Jones muttered. 'Give me an A-list biography any day. Who'd want to read a thing like that?'

'Oh, it's not all blood and gore.' DI Stephens opened the book. He noticed she had placed a post-it note on one page. Something was written on the note, but he couldn't make out what it was. It was stuck haphazardly, and he wondered why she hadn't bothered to straighten it out.

'It's more about Donatella, the wife,' she said, 'trying to carve out a life for herself in a time when women were supposed to put up with anything. For a wedding present she is given a sampler with "Man must be pleased; but him to please / Is woman's pleasure" embroidered in the middle. Around it are angels' wings. It's from a famous Victorian poem, "The Angel in the House. "'

'Guv,' Jones muttered, leaning against the doorway between the lounge and the hall. 'I feel like I've been sent back to Year Eight. I was never any good at English, you know.'

Chris stared down at the floor. The brown carpet was cheap, beginning to fray.

'Okay, Sergeant. You win. We are not here to talk about English literature,' DI Stephens said, smiling benignly. 'We just came to give Chris some news.'

He shrugged, focussed his attention on the faded watercolour above her head. 'Yeah?'

The DI stared at him quizzically as though he was a child or simple and she was trying to find words he would understand. She leaned towards him, steepling her fingers. 'Those remains of a child you found – up at Flaights Chapel, I expect you've been wondering who they belonged to?'

He shifted in his seat, aware that he smelled dirty. He needed to wash and sleep. Glancing up at the faded watercolour on the wall, he wished he was up, up in those curled clouds, looking down at the bleached landscape below, with no questions to answer, no real need to do anything. This momentary dream was ruined by the fact that the picture was slightly askew, no longer in careful alignment with the wall and the sofa. His arms tensed; the urge to get up and straighten it was physical.

Jones's radio crackled. She put the receiver to her ear and moved outside.



‘While she’s gone,’ DI Stephens leaned forward again, as though they were best mates, left alone at last, to have a heart to heart. ‘I had Cathy’s social media accounts checked out.’

He shoved his hands under his buttocks and shut his eyes tight. The picture was all wrong, skewed. He needed to get up and straighten it. He needed to be on his own.

‘Yeah?’

He wished he could make a noise, a noise louder than all this talk echoing around his flat, wished he could drown out Detective Inspector Stephens. Why were they pecking away at him like this, peck peck peck like birds scratting for corn.

‘You probably didn’t want us to find out about the postings?’ A soft voice now, sympathetic. ‘You were no doubt trying to remain anonymous. But it must have upset you, your own wife plundering your research like that ... Using it in her novel.’

He shook his head. Sometimes he wished he had never talked about his work, wished he had never shown Cathy his dissertation or discussed the life of Elijah Thomas. The way she had taken it and remoulded it, sucking the heart from the truth, slapping fragments together like ill matching pieces of jigsaw, was nothing short of criminal.

Jones returned, smelling of fags. She walked right into the room, bent down and whispered something to Stephens, who, vexed by whatever she said, shook her head vehemently. Jones returned to her position at the door.

The DI cleared her throat to get his attention. ‘About the baby up at Flaights. We gave the story to the press and as luck would have it – for you – a young local woman has come forward. It is very sad. She fell pregnant when she was only fourteen and too scared to tell anyone. When the baby was born dead she put her in the plastic box and hid her in up at Flaights. She said she always hoped someone would find it, so she could be given a proper burial, so you did her a favour in a way. She called the baby Emily, thought it was a nice name.’ She paused for a moment, as though expecting some reaction from him. When he gave none, she tried again: ‘We thought you would want to know?’

He stared at the picture. He had not wanted to know. He was not interested in that child. Why would they think he was? But the name, Emily, struck a chord. What was it, someone called Emily, Emmeline, a popular Victorian name. Was it one of the mill girls?

He thought back, able to recite the twenty-five with hardly a thought. No Emmeline there. Closer to home: Emmeline was Elijah Thomas's daughter, his only child. She'd died of cholera a few years before the mill girls disappeared. Emmeline. The name knocked against his consciousness until he could stand it no more. There was something he was missing. He stood up, walked up to the picture and aligned it neatly with the top of the wall and the sofa. He then started on the library books that had collapsed in a heap on the mantelshelf: *Working Class Childhood* and *Child Labour in Victorian England*, *The Pauper Apprentices*, *The Orphan Workers of Victorian England* and others. Ignoring the police officers, he placed them on the floor and began to arrange them, tallest first, chocked up by a wooden elephant back on the shelf

'Sit down, Christopher, please!' Jones barked at him, making his hand tremble. An old copy of *Rawton Bridge: Valley of Death*, dropped and splayed on the carpet, scattering some of its pages. 'Your housekeeping can wait!'

He took his seat and shivered. The flat was chilly although the heating had been on. There was too much water in Rawton Bridge. Good for fulling cloth and running water wheels two hundred years ago but not so great when you lived near the river in a century where all clothes were made abroad.

Again, the DI leaned toward him though this time her sweater was tight against her chest, no allowance for cleavage. He sensed a change in her, a hardening. 'Chris, did you troll Cathy on social media after her book was published?' Steel in her tone.

He stared down at his knees. This was all irrelevant. There was something significant about Emmeline's death, something, to which he must return.

'We've read through all the messages in Cathy's account, beginning four years ago when the first message from 'Miller' appeared. The posts become progressively more threatening, until eventually, Cathy began to take them down. Christopher, they were sent from your computer.'

He slid his little finger into his mouth and bit at the nail. This was not something that needed discussion. The world needed to know the truth about the real Elijah Thomas, otherwise Cathy's libellous invention would be the only one that stood.

‘I suspected that Elijah Thomas, the famous mill owner, murdered the girls he indentured in his mill –’

‘And you told Cathy this?’ Jones asked, scribbling in her notebook.

He closed his eyes again, clutched at the edge of his chair. He’d been excited, finding the evidence of meetings held in secret in council offices, local stories about Thomas’s love of young girls. There was even a nursery rhyme in which he was implicated. Cathy had been excited too. It was the only thing about him that had interested her for years. It was then that she’d started helping him more willingly; typing up notes, collating information. Before this, she’d made excuses not to even look at his work. He had not realised that it was because she was stealing from him.

‘And you think she took this information and used it in her novel ... Surely, though, this doesn’t matter so much,’ Sergeant Jones said. ‘A story in a novel is a made-up thing. No one expects it to be true.’

DI Stephens sat upright, alert and excited; the space of flesh between her chin and chest was tinged with pink. She had placed Cathy’s book on the sofa beside her. Chris wished he could pick it up and hurl it through the window. It should never have been published.

‘People don’t read history books the way they read novels,’ he said, holding up the copy of *Rawton Bridge: Valley of Death*. ‘Take this book, DI. As much work, probably more, went into its research. And it must be accurate. There are rules about what can be published. You can’t just make up the ending, like you can in novels. Facts must be proved, empirical evidence found. Such works are peer reviewed ... And yet, people are probably more likely to believe the vague claims of an author with no background in history, just because they happen to have written a best seller! Look at Charles Dickens. Most people only know about prison ships and factory lock-outs because of him!’ The window shook with the violence of the rain. He sat back, panting a little, his heart fluttering in his chest. He felt as though he was back in Burnside University again, lecturing to a bunch of uninterested youths in a stuffy classroom. He tried again, gripping the book with increased vehemence.

‘The *vague claims* of authors like Cathy Adams?’ the DI butted in. ‘That must have hurt. After all the work you did; years and years of detailed research, Cathy seems to have taken it all and, without caring for truth or detail, published it in her book. To add insult to injury, it is very successful.’

‘Over eighty thousand copies of *On Angels’ Wings* sold in 2013,’ Chris said. ‘That means that at least eighty thousand people think Elijah Thomas bought girls from workhouses, took them to his mill and murdered them. All this while his own wife was busy finding out what he was up to and aborting her own child, then running away. Cathy’s story is based on rumour and conjecture and downright lies –’

‘But it is a novel. I doubt the readers thought much about where the book idea came from.’ DI Stephens said.

‘You don’t understand. Cathy announced that she’d researched Elijah Thomas and the disappearance of his mill girls on national radio. *Anyone* would think this was the truth about him.’

The DI changed tack. ‘A previous draft of the book, found on Cathy’s computer, suggests she had another ending in mind, one in which Donatella’s jealousy gets the better of her and indirectly causes the deaths. Moreover, Cathy’s chapter in the Hunt and Smithson Guide to Novel Writing, also refers to this ending.

‘That was a first attempt, badly written and plotted, though the final version probably did more damage. She sent the chapter on endings to Hunt and Smithson without me knowing.’

‘And you were compelled to tell the world?’ DI Stephens’s voice was so gentle, understanding, he almost believed that she genuinely cared for him. ‘This is why you took up the Twitter account.’

Chris closed his eyes. He must focus. Emmeline. How did her death help him come closer to the truth?

‘You put some awful things on there,’ Sergeant Jones said. ‘If I’d been Cathy, I would have been well scared.’

‘I had to get her to listen to me,’ he said quietly. He felt his world spiralling away from him. It was impossible to concentrate on Emmeline when he had been catapulted back to his own past.

Once the book was published it was as though Cathy wasn’t his anymore. She was out all the time, at signings and readings. With Alex Wadsworth. God knew, he had tried but she wouldn’t take the book off the market. She behaved as though the body of knowledge concerning Elijah Thomas, gleaned over so many years, was hers to plunder as she wished. After his suicide attempt, things had got better for a little while; she was softer with him, more sympathetic, but underneath she was as steely as ever in her resolve to publicise her book. ‘You don’t own me,’ she would say. ‘And you don’t own Elijah Thomas, either.’

‘There is something else that intrigued me about the novel,’ Stephens said now, swinging her mantle of brown hair forward so that it almost covered her face. ‘There are two versions of *On Angels’ Wings* – one on your hard drive and one on Cathy’s. They are both very nearly the same, save for a few sections. We got a student intern to go through them. The only one in the office with enough time!’

He shook his head, dumbly, stared now at his text books piled neatly on the floor and thought about cataloguing the volumes, the way in which librarians must order, check and order. He scraped some mud from his jacket, watched it powder onto his jeans. He must do the same, check and order, ensure that no stone was unturned. Concentrate. Somehow, Emmeline’s death was important to the story of the lost mill girls. But how? More research was needed, more time to think.

‘One of the anomalies is on page 199. The line, ‘She was free’, which Donatella thinks immediately after aborting her first child. This does not appear in the copy of *On Angels’ Wings* which we found on Cathy’s computer hard drive. Only on yours. And yet this was the copy that went into print. Why was that?’

Chris shrugged. ‘Donatella didn’t want holding back. She wanted to be away from him – Elijah. Free. A child would have put a stop to that.’

‘Elias, you mean?’ the DI reminded gently.

He stared at her, blinking like a mole reaching daylight. ‘Elias?’

‘Yes!’ DI Stephens held the book out at the relevant page. ‘Elias Raptor, in Cathy’s book. Not Elijah Thomas, the historical figure. They are not the same person. One is fictional.’

Sergeant Jones’s radio crackled again and this time, she didn’t leave the room to answer it. She nodded to Stephens. ‘Nearly time to go, guv. Leave him to think it over.’

The DI nodded and stood up. ‘Just one last thing about Cathy’s novel, Chris. ‘The ending. In Cathy’s version, Donatella runs away, back to her family, because she feels culpable for the deaths of the girls; on your computer, and in the printed edition, Donatella only thinks about leaving. In your ending, she joins Elias, becoming a kind of Hindley to his Brady.’

He closed his eyes trying to unravel the tangled threads of story in his head. ‘I... We worked together. Sometimes, I suggested alternatives that she took up –’

‘Chris, who exactly wrote *On Angels’ Wings* – Cathy or you?’

The room pulsed in time with his heartbeat, everything throbbing to some universal time signature, making him rock slightly back and forth. ‘I ... we w. . . worked together –’ He had it. The lightbulb moment. Everything else now faded into insignificance.

‘Cathy’s Twitter account has a whole thread debating it. But then, you started the rumour.’ Stephens insisted, holding the book flat against her chest.

He nodded, impatient for them to be gone. Emmeline Thomas had died in 1847. Elijah Thomas was planning to sail to Europe with her on *The Swan* in 1851. Why would he plan to sail with a daughter who was already dead?

DI Stephens bent and handed him yet another of her cards, and he caught a drift of her floral perfume. ‘Give me a ring if you think of anything,’ she said softly, leaving it on the sofa when he didn’t take it from her hands. ‘Day or night. And remember, Chris. We will find the culprit.’

He hardly looked up as they left his flat, ushering in a rush of sleety rain as they opened the door. If Emmeline was dead, buried in the churchyard at Flaights, then who was Elijah planning to take abroad with him? Two versions of the same story. Which was correct?



Initially, the connoisseur of Pop might consider Adams' work to stand outside the fetish of consumerism explored by Warhol et al. His sumptuous oil paintings of women belong to a long tradition of nudes in interiors – there is not a logo or a cut out in sight. But look again and consider the audience for these melancholy women. Is not the woman's body as much an object for the consumer market as a can of soup? Adams' lavish use of colour transforms these women into neon billboards, anonymous and impersonal. They are displayed in

deliberately provocative poses, often with legs open, inviting the viewer to observe the more intimate details of their bodies. But these women are Trojan horses. 'Jade' (fig 23.) is neither sexually available nor is she for sale. Her pose is tentative, defensive. The viewer feels almost guilty to have pried into her private world. The bright colours only serve to enforce the message that this woman is under siege. The most striking aspect of the image, however, lies in the absence of clear facial features. Her eyes are little more than black hollows staring out at us. The rest of her face comprises an amorphous mass, delineated only by careful application of lilac paint. What is she thinking? Who is she?

The application of paint also deserved contemplation. By using thin washes of oil colour to build mass and denote light, Adams' 'Jade' is al-

## Bony

It had taken a while for him to catch on to what Sam was trying to tell him, a while for him, to decode the sloping curve of her chin, the set of her jaw. She'd done her best to jog his memory, taking him back down the years but he had failed to see where she was heading. It came as a shock that he had forgotten Ailsa, lovely black-haired Ailsa. He had overlaid her image in his memory with other people and events, just as Ruby had disappeared beneath the Crag in his painting. He was Sam's father. She was his, a child conceived in a moment of craziness and he could barely remember a thing. Jeez. He lit up a joint, took a toke and lay back on the sofa.

The Burnside days. The last time Humph had come up to visit him. Good old Humph in his outdated tweeds and bow tie in 1979, offering 'young fillies' a lift in his E-Type Jag, toot tooting on his horn like Toad. They'd met in The Shepherd's Rest Inn up on the moors. He and Humph and Ailsa. It was one of those rare and perfect summer days and they'd lounged at the picnic table outside, drinking a heady local beer brewed with heather, their faces turned to the sun. The sky was a wispy powder blue. Around them Scarcroft moor shimmered with heat, bees hummed drowsily in the heather. She'd worn a little white dress with flounces on the skirt; it made her look like a child. Beneath the frills, her legs were bare. She sat beside him, holding his arm as though she would never let it go, those white thighs across his own and he had been fascinated by the delicate pattern of lapis coloured veins mapping her skin, a perfect match for the cornflowers growing scrappily in a small flowerbed outside the pub. It was the end of term, the last day. The following term, Ailsa was due to go to art college in London. She was a star student. They had spent the day drinking and he had put her in a taxi at around tea time. It was the last he saw of her.

That was it, all he could recall, save for the first kiss outside another pub in the dark. Nothing of her conversation, only her skin. He remembered more about Humph that day, trying to persuade him to appear on some crazy TV show. After Ailsa had gone, he and Humph had carried on drinking. The heather beer was substituted by a single malt. He remembered his old friend, maudlin with the booze, shouting out at the darkening



moorland: ‘Those that can, do, those that can’t end up being fucking art critics and agents!’ Sometimes he got like this, mad at the world, mad at himself. ‘You’re the lucky one, old man,’ he had slurred at Bony. ‘You’re the painter. You get the cushy number *and* the girl. I only get to write about you.’ Six weeks later, Humph’s book *Flare!* had been published with a great fanfare and he could have got any girl he wanted.

The painting of the crag loomed over Bony, uncompromising, accusing. It was ridiculous that Humph would think him lucky. Humphrey Lyde was the one with it all – money, a title (he was somehow related to the Royal family, on the wrong side of the sheets). He was successful at everything he did – except for painting, but that was only because he didn’t put the time in, preferred swanning around galleries in London, where it was all *dahling!* and *sweetie!* air kisses and *Gitanes*. Bony, at the time, was a widow entering middle age with a disturbed teenaged son in his care and a slowly declining career as a painter (though he hadn’t known it at the time), lecturing in the provincial university where he’d transgressed and bedded one of the students.

But none of this mattered. Sam had come out of the ether wanting him to acknowledge her. It blew his mind to think that she had studied art, had watched him since she was a kid, following every move he made, all so that one day she could come and claim what was hers: a father. But he’d failed to understand, and disappointment had flickered through her like autumn shadow, obliterating the light of what he now knew had been hope. He sighed, exhaling a wobbly smoke ring. Was it too late to make up? Jeez, he hadn’t even known Sam existed. *But you knew something was wrong*, a little voice insisted, a voice both within and without. *You think that normal, good people have your bad luck? Your son is half mad, Cathy has been killed. You must pay for your nights of thoughtlessness with a girl less than half your age.* The balance of nature; it was right after all. Karma had been snapping at his heels for years. Now it had caught up.

But at least he had Sam’s project figured out. The *Vite* was her attempt to understand just how a man like him, an artist, can absorb his failings into his work and still carry on.

Trembling, he rose and went to his painting, holding onto the corner of the easel as an agony of shame shuddered through him. No wonder she wanted to interview him. She was looking for herself in those paintings. She was trying to find her rightful heritage.

His limbs ached, his eyes watered. He had to make it up to her. Prove that somehow, he wasn't just a selfish bum who'd abandoned her mother. Jeez, he hadn't known Ailsa was pregnant; as far as he was concerned, she'd gone off to Goldsmiths to seek her fortune and hadn't given him another thought.

But that was no good to Sam. She needed some recompense. She deserved an explanation. He would find the paintings he had made of Ailsa, the photographs, any other trinkets. She deserved that much. He would find them and wrap them up and take them down to the hotel in the morning and tell Sam how sorry he was that she had grown up without him, that her mother had been so alone. He would try to set the record straight.

Leaving the security of his studio, he made his way along the hallway. The storm still raged outside, the wind making a hollow instrument of the house and moaning through the ill-fitting casement windows, the unused chimney. He kept his old canvases in the cellar. Years ago, he'd paid for it to be damp-proofed and secured so that the work could be kept safely, but this was a wet climate and the house, although built on millstone grit, was surrounded by moorland peat. The moisture came in whatever he did with air vents and dehumidifiers and the place always smelled musty. He flicked the lights on, two fluorescent strip bulbs emitting a sickly, bismuth-yellow light as they fizzled into life. Here, his life's work was stacked and labelled, wrapped ready for the odd exhibition or photographic opportunity that came his way, though this happened less and less these days. The pictures looked ghostly, shrouded in plastic. His head pounded. This was it, the sum total of his seventy years on the planet, all he had to show for his time, except for Chris and Jake of course. Except for Sam. He swallowed. There had been other women, of course. Brief, sweaty little flings that amounted to nothing, or so he thought. How many others had grown up without his knowledge? How many other tragedies with his name linked to them?

The paintings stacked against the back wall were the oldest, dating from the sixties and seventies. Ailsa was not likely to be among them. All the same, he found himself drawn to the old wooden stretchers, stained and pitted with paint and nail holes. He pulled the bubble wrap down from one and revealed an acrylic painting of his mother in '67. Her gnarled hands clutched the arms of an old green baize. If he'd been older, wiser, he would

have known she didn't have long. Her eyes gave it away, faded, watering, they looked out, but also inward. Three months after he finished the painting, she was dead. There were other, younger portraits of her but this to him seemed the most poignant. She had been younger than he was now.

He moved the painting aside, searching for Ailsa but he had first to go through his earlier works, the paintings, sketches, studies of the woman who had become his wife. There were many. Too many. He had painted and drawn Sylvie obsessively for over nine years and he had kept every single representation, from the first shy watercolour impressions painted at Art College, to the later pop art versions of her, slickly rendered in gaudy acrylic. It was the story of their marriage, the story of their love and its ruin. Many of the images had never seen the light of day; they were private totems of his adoration, tender moments as lover or mother and child. Driven only by a need to recompense, to balance his disturbed energies, he ripped the bubble wrap plastic from each picture, uncaring that this covering was the sole barrier his life's work possessed against decomposition. He exposed eighty-four images of Sylvie. Meeting her face to face in the damp chill of his cellar on this winter's night forty years later felt good, as though some cosmic adjustment was taking place. He had loved Sylvie, loved her beauty, her willingness to bear his child, but he had failed her, and she had gone.

Feeling jumpy, he returned to the earlier images, those tentative and adoring paintings of a confident young woman. In the later paintings, not only had he failed to worship her with his brush and pencil, but she had lost her self-possession. In some of them, he thought he could trace fate in her pleading eyes. Among these images was a small drawing that Sylvie herself had made. It was of an apple tree, its trunk old and bulging with canker, but its branches stretched upwards to the sky, as though in some weird supplication. It had been drawn in pencil with a delicate hand. It was shocking, more shocking than any of his own experiments that had so impressed the world. This was a portrait of desperation made by someone whose freedom, as a woman, as an artist, had been lost. This was why she had left him: better to escape than live as a poor, grounded, diseased thing, ever pleading for release.

He found a few of the drawings he had made in the late seventies when already the landscape was beginning to claim him. But Ailsa was not among them. She came later, in 1980, in all her black haired, azure-eyed glory. Jeez, what had he done to deserve such a beauty? She stared out brazenly as *Jade* and at last he remembered her thin white legs wrapping around his back, her cute and crazy conversations about art and life. He had a distant image of her lying on a bed of peacock blue, his making marks upon a canvas in chilly tones; the smell of linseed in a small room. He looked a little more intently, realising with a jolt that Sam must be older than the Ailsa of *Jade* by nearly twenty years.

He placed them side by side, Ailsa and Sylvie. Both mothers of his children; both lost to him. He hadn't asked Sam what had become of Ailsa. Did she fulfil her potential as an artist, he wondered, recalling her delicate washes of colour, watery treescapes and shaded interiors? Had she met someone who cared for her? He hoped so.

'Ailsa was already pregnant with me when she left for London,' Sam had announced this afternoon as he scraped away at his canvas. She had waited a moment, her red Geisha lips tense, giving him silence, giving him time, but when he continued his work without acknowledging her words, she'd fled. He'd thought at first that she was just going to the bathroom, but she was already in her car, driving away. What an idiot he was! She must have been devastated by his seeming indifference. But he'd needed to process the news she must have known all her life. He'd go after her later. She wouldn't have set off back to London tonight, surely? As if in answer, the wind moaned through the walls.

He cast about now, feeling high, feverish, grabbing the canvases, the scrolled papers, tearing at plastic. His women stared up at him accusingly from the damp floor of the cellar. If only he could make Sam understand: these images were his legacy, his *Vite*. He stuffed the drawings for *Jade* under his arm and made for the cellar steps, determined to give them to Sam. He would drive after her, fall down on his knees, apologise. Who knows, she might be able to return the drawings to their rightful owner, to Ailsa. It was a shame he didn't have the actual painting, but it had gone to a collector twenty odd years ago.

At the top of the stairs he stopped. A noise like barrels rolling on flags rumbled through the house. He couldn't work out where it was coming from; it seemed part of the

fabric of the place, resonating through the brickwork. The storm sure was a bad one. He needed a joint to clear his jumbled thoughts, a nice roll-up of weed, for calm, at least inside his head, to be restored.

Back in the studio his new painting seemed to have taken over, a thing so massive and dark it bore down on him, violent and majestic. It needed finishing. A touch of lemon in the clouds. He dropped the studies of Ailsa to scrabble among his paints, but nothing seemed to be working any more, his fingers felt thick, clumsy. The rose-coloured gash in the crag was opening, its edges lit from behind, gold, bleeding to searing white. He was dazzled. The red and the light washed over him. The muse was calling. He took up his brush, all thoughts of Sam and her *Vite* and how he could make amends, forgotten.

Plate 27



## Jake

It took Jake a second or two to remember her name. ‘Sam?’ An hour after she’d dropped him off at home, she was back.

‘There’s t ... too much rain, I’ve had to abandon the car,’ she stuttered. She was shivering, her hair dripping, her black eye makeup running down her face. In the yellow light of the porch, she looked like some zombie freak. ‘I. . . I didn’t know where to go. The water seems to be bursting up from the road –’

‘Oh, okay.’ He peered out. Rain was coming down in what Mum would call ‘stair rods’ though what a stair rod might be, he had no idea. He could hear a kind of roaring noise which sounded like a river though there was no river nearby.

‘ – it was up to the wheel arches. Just down here – outside. God, I was so scared. I thought I was going to get trapped. It was so sudden. One minute it was okay and then I seemed to be sitting in a lake ...’

He stood aside to let her in. It was kind of embarrassing to have one of his pervy old Grampa’s mates here. She was really soaking; all her clothes were dripping, and she was shaking so hard he could hardly make out what she was saying. He remembered turning up to Alex’s in a similar state. ‘You’d best get changed.’ It was even more embarrassing having to say this to a woman he didn’t know, someone so much older. ‘I’ll see if there’s something in Mum’s room.’

He left her standing in the hall and bounded up the stairs. At least with someone else in the house, he wasn’t so chicken about going into his mother’s bedroom. He ripped down the plastic, flicked on the light and looked around for suitable clothes for Sam. On the back of the door Mum’s old blue gown was hanging as it always had, like she was about to walk in, put it on and make a cup of tea. Like she would sit as she always did, with her legs curled under her on the sofa, reading a book. It smelled of her. For a second, he pressed his nose into the soft worn fabric. Fuck. Not that, he couldn’t bear to see that on someone else. He opened drawers, drawers he knew would have already been rifled through by the police. A drawer of pyjamas, one of knickers, another of jumpers and

trousers, all clothes he knew so well, clothes that bore the shape of his mother's body, hiding within the folds. Fuck, what could he find for Sam? He pulled another drawer a little too hard and it came out of the chest, spilling its contents onto the floor. A deep red fleecy thing fell out and he remembered Dad had bought it for Mum a few years ago. It was a kind of zip-up onesie with white stars all over it. Mum had never worn it as far as he knew. He shook it out. It still bore the price tag from some bargain shop and the price. Dad was such a cheapskate. He ripped off the label, then bundled it up in his arms, anxious to leave the room and all its memories. He was just about to turn out the light, when he saw a business card on the floor; he was sure it hadn't been there before. Perhaps it had come out of the drawer when he pulled it. A picture of a London bus on the front, a phone number on the back and the words, 'phone me x'. He popped it in the back pocket of his jeans to study later.

When Sam was cleaned up and looking like some kids' cartoon in the oversized onesie, he made her a 'Cupasoup', minestrone, his mum's favourite.

'You've probably saved my life,' she said. She had dried out, but her eyes still streamed. 'I thought I was a goner out there.'

He shrugged and sat down on the sofa – she was on Dad's chair, but she looked kind of wrong in it, all small and scared. He was sorry for her. 'If you hadn't given me a lift, you would probably be home by now. Are you okay?'

She nodded but she looked the total opposite. Crying her eyes out. He picked up the TV remote and cradled it in his hand. Should he turn the telly back on or would that be ignorant? Should he ask her what was wrong, or was she just freaked by her car getting stuck; should he tell her to stay the night? A silence was opening up now, one that was filled by the sound of pissing rain and the wind crashing over Rawton Moor. He remembered Bony running after her, his hands clawing the back window of her car. What the fuck was going on?

'Jake –'

'Er... Sam –' Total embarrassment, both of them speaking at once. He squeezed the remote and the telly burst into life. Some housebuilding programme. Mum loved those.



‘Jake – I guess you must be curious about who I am?’

He pressed the off button but hit the volume and Kevin McCloud’s voice boomed into the room. At last he turned it off. ‘A bit,’ he said and looked over at her. She was still crying so he stared at the blank telly instead.

‘There’s no easy way to tell you this.’ Now she was sobbing, snot coming out of her nose, her face all swollen and covered in smears of makeup. ‘I’m your aunt, Jake. Your dad’s half-sister, your grandfather’s daughter. I ... I’m family.’ When she said the word ‘family’, she seemed to crack open, blubbing even more. Jake shook his head, thinking Grampa, the randy old goat. She leaned towards him, her hand reaching out to his like Grampa’s claw on the car. He stopped himself from shrinking away. ‘So, so maybe this is a chance to get to know each other?’ she finished, hopefully.

He stared up at her. There was no way she looked like Dad. Miles younger for a start. All that jet-black hair, drying off now, whereas Dad’s was mouse and grey. But maybe she was a bit Bonyish. Her nose was kind of pointy like his. It was hard to see her eyes under all those tears and smeary black.

‘I came to see your grandfather as I am working on a project about British artists. It was a good excuse to meet him, too –’

‘How long have you known?’ Jake interrupted. ‘About Grampa. Since you were little?’

‘God, no.’ She swigged down the rest of the soup and put the mug on the floor. ‘Only a few weeks.’

‘Fucking hell.’ He stood up and the remote went tumbling to the floor. Mum had wine and stuff in the kitchen cupboard. The cider was all gone so it would have to do. ‘I’m getting a drink. Want one?’ He stumbled into the kitchen, opened a bottle of red wine and slopped it into two mugs. The wine glasses were in another cupboard, but he wasn’t bothered. Sam took hers and sipped.

‘Claret?’ she said. ‘Nice.’

‘So, you told Grampa?’ He sat down again. This was like something from a movie.

‘I tried to.’ Another sob shuddered through her. ‘But I’m not sure he wants to know.’

‘But he must!’ A surge of anger made his face grow warm. Grampa was such a douchebag. First the painting of Mum, now this, his own daughter, and he wasn’t interested. As if his family couldn’t get any worse! ‘What about my dad, does he know?’ Weird the thought of Dad having a sister. He was always kind of alone.

‘I never met your dad.’ Sam gulped at her wine. ‘It might be better if I write to him first. It’s a bit of a shock finding out you’ve got a sister, I guess. I’ve had a few weeks ...’

‘But how come your mum never told you before?’ Jake sloshed some more wine in both their mugs. It tasted better the more he drank. The pretend flame of the fire blew about in the wind coming down the chimney, with a weird hissing noise.

Sam stared into her drink. She was still crying but not so hard now. Tears dripped down her face and landed on the rim of the mug. ‘I don’t know. I suppose she was protecting my father ... I mean, the man who I’d been brought up to believe was my father.’

‘Does he know?’

She nodded. ‘Mum died four weeks ago. Cancer. It was awful. Just before she died – when she could still talk – I was in her room. I went every day, sat with her to give Dad a break. Anyway, this day, she gripped hold of my hand and pulled me in close. It was strange. She wasn’t like that, my mum. Never affectionate. Always aloof. Never a hair out of place before her illness ...’

‘So, what did she say?’

‘She just said, “Samantha. Your father is the artist, Bony Adams. I always meant to tell you, but it was never the right moment. Now I am dying.”’

‘You must’ve been well freaked?’

Sam sat back into the chair and drained the mug. ‘The thing is, I wasn’t. Not really. I’d been brought up with Bony Adams’ work. We had prints of his paintings in the hall, on the landing. His *Nudes in Interiors* were round the bathroom. Mum always said she liked them. It was almost as though I had *known*. Some part of me responded to his work like a daughter, rather than a detached onlooker. Does that sound crazy?’

Jake shook his head. The wine was making him dizzy. Nothing sounded crazy any more. Now his mum had been murdered, it seemed everything in his life, all the solid reassuring stuff, was being ripped away. A new aunt? Bring it on.

‘So, your dad – I mean the guy you thought was your dad, how old were you when he married your mum?’ he asked, curious now, in a distant kind of way.

‘That’s just it. Daddy is amazing. They married before I was even born. Legally and in every other way apart from biology, he is my dad!’

Jake stood up and began to pace the room. It was all too weird. But he was kind of glad he had an aunt. She was nice, despite her posh southern accent.

‘Phone,’ Sam said now, and it took a second or two for him to realise what she was saying. His mobile was in the hall and the ringing was muted by the hissing of the gas flame and the wind bashing about outside. He ran to pick up.

‘Jake – thank God, I’ve been trying to get you for ages. I tried your grandfather’s but no reply. I was hoping you hadn’t given your mobile in yet.’ It was Alex and she sounded wired.

‘Yeah?’

‘There’s something I’ve remembered,’ she said.

‘Okay?’

‘Jake, when we were at your house...’ But her voice broke up and he was left shouting into a dull humming. He hung up; whatever she wanted would have to wait till the wind died down. He looked down at his phone. Two messages. One of his usual ones and the other from Maddie: We need to talk. He smiled to himself. If she wanted to talk, things weren’t so bad between them. She didn’t think he was some crazy woman batterer. The wine had warmed him through, given him a pleasant buzz. There was plenty more where that came from.

‘Okay,’ he said, going back into the sitting room to his new aunt. ‘You ready for another drink?’

UNDERCLIFFE INDENTURE

DONAHUE E.

Indenture of Elizabeth Donahue aged eight years seven months.

This Indenture witnesseth that Elizabeth Donahue orphan of the Parish of Liverpool in the county of Lancashire doth herself apprentice to Elijah Thomas in the parish of Rawclough in the county of West Yorkshire owner of Undercliffe spinning mill Rawton Bridge to serve from the day of the date hereof until the full end of term of ten years from thence next following to be fully compleat and ended. During the term the said apprentice her said Master faithfully shall serve his secrets keep his lawful commands everywhere shall do. She shall do no damage to her said Master. She shall not commit fornication not contract matrimony during the said term. She shall not haunt taverns nor playhouses nor absent herself from her said Master's service day or night unlawfully but in all things as a faithful apprentice she shall behave herself towards her said Master during the said term. And in consideration of the four pounds charity money by the Parish of Liverpool shall the aforesaid apprentice in the skill of throstle offer and cause to be taught and instructed in ch. washing, and lodging and

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## Chris

Chris braved the torrential rain and was back in the library as soon as it opened. After the police had left his flat, he had spent hours on the microfiche looking for stray newspaper articles, some clue to the identity of Elijah Thomas's new wife. But the only evidence seemed to be the one-time temple, which later became the public toilets in the middle of the park, and one measly article. Not enough. He took a seat in the local history section, trying not to breathe in the stench of the homeless guy who'd followed him in and was now studying the Yorkshire Post on the opposite table. There but for the grace of God, the Reverend Arkwright used to say. Funny how such memories lay lurking, ready for the right moment. And he was right. He'd now spent enough time being questioned by the police to know he was in the frame for Cathy's murder. He was sliding towards an inevitable doom, a prison cell, probably, and he felt helpless to resist.

He opened volume IV of the *History of West Yorkshire*, a weighty tome, one of sixteen compiled by Inigo Theramin of Leeds between 1870 and 1924. This volume had been long out of print and was destined for obscurity when a fragile copy had been donated to the library a couple of months ago. Library staff had scanned and reprinted it, and this was his first chance to take a look. It was a long shot but worth a try.

Inigo had worked tirelessly to record everything, from the declaration of war to the most seemingly trivial of events going back to the age of the Wapentakes and beyond. His methods of cataloguing were not very consistent – in fact the early works were somewhat haphazard – but if his Civil War pages were rudimentary, there was no other source that set down the minutiae of nineteenth and early twentieth century life in the area in such vivid detail. Chris scrolled down the index of 1830-55, turned to the chosen page for 1851 and was shocked to find, quite out of sequence, a crude lithograph of Holman Hunt's 1853 painting, *The Awakening Conscience*. He bit at his thumb nail; sometimes he suspected he was being followed.

The name 'Miller' had been an obvious choice. Annie Miller – the model for the mistress in Hunt's painting, one of Bony's favourite – looked a bit like Cathy. She was half sitting, half standing, as though she'd just remembered she should have been at her

dentist appointment half an hour ago. The guy on whose knee she had been perched was a smarmy, complacent type, someone used to women doing what he wanted. Chris wiped away the sweat that had beaded at his hairline. There had been another reason for the moniker, too. Cathy had been reading a biography of Arthur Miller and Marilyn Monroe. Sitting in bed, after being out all day with Alex, or with her agent or publisher, she read out snippets to him and he began to identify with the hapless playwright at the mercy of a selfish and capricious woman.

He remembered the surge of power he felt when the account was set up, when he became Miller, Cathy's biggest fan, Cathy's *bête noir*. As in real life, oh how easy it had been to move from adoration to accusation, sending messages each day with the fanaticism of a madman. But it had backfired. Cathy never said a word to him. Had she not cared, not noticed? Had she guessed it was him?

He turned the page, obliterating *The Awakening Conscience*, looking for anything that might shed some light on the identity of Elijah's new wife, but found nothing. The marriage itself wasn't recorded anywhere. He had already checked the local registers and yet the librarian had been so sure that the temple in the park had been built by Elijah for his wife as a romantic gesture.

Chris looked back on his notes. Elijah Thomas's wife, Anne, had died in 1838; the temple was erected in 1853. It was quite conceivable that he had married again, but why was there no record and did this have any bearing on the disappearance of twenty-five mill girls? What if he had got the date of Anne's death wrong?

He turned back to Theramin's *History*. Funerals were obviously a great fascination of his; there were so many listed, from the brief ceremonies conducted over the mass typhoid and cholera pits of nameless paupers, to impressive affairs where the number of plumed steeds were recorded, as well as the name and rank of mourners. He found details of Anne's funeral almost immediately. Fifty-six people had attended a service at Flaights chapel; she was interred in the churchyard, just as he had thought. As Chris pored over the legions of dead, another name caught his eye: Emmeline Thomas, Elijah's only daughter who'd died in February 1851. He checked back in his notes. There could be no

doubt. The Rawton Courier article was written in May, days before the pair were supposed to sail.

If Emmeline was already dead, who was the daughter Elijah was taking with him?

The library door opened, admitting no doubt others like the homeless guy who had now nodded off behind The Telegraph, as his coat dried pungently on the old metal radiator. A draught blew into the room and whipped up the pages of his notebook. Chris shivered and hunched into his chair, his mind whirring. He was so tantalisingly close. A daughter assumed alive but actually dead. A wife assumed dead but either replaced or alive.

‘Dad?’

A hand clamped on his shoulder and almost caused him to jump out of his chair. Chris swung round. Jake and a woman he didn’t recognise were standing against the meagre light seeping through the library window

‘I want you to meet someone.’ Jake smelled of alcohol, he looked wild-eyed and unkempt.

Chris sighed with irritation.

‘Hi.’ The woman stepped forward but against the light it was difficult to make out her features. She was small, black-haired. He gave a cursory smile, why must he always be interrupted when he was so close to finding some answers.

‘Dad,’ Jake was still bent towards him, his chin almost on Chris’s shoulder. ‘This’ll come as kind of a shock –’

‘Sam.’ The woman put out her hand. It was clad in a lilac coloured leather glove and seemed outrageously small. ‘Chris, I ... I’m pleased to meet you at last. Jake wanted me to tell you before I leave. Thought it would be better than a letter or an email .... Your dad – Bony. He’s my dad too. I’m your sister.’

This time, Chris did turn away. What new disruption was this? His sister? He wasn’t looking for a sister. He gripped the edge of the *History*. His notebook slid from his knee and he bent down, noticing Sam’s neat ballet pumps in polished black. They reminded him, ridiculously, of his mother, her tea-coloured stockings, shiny patent-leather court shoes. He scrambled to retrieve the book from the dusty floor. It had fallen open on his

reference to the new 'prentice house, his only other lead. The old rhyme whirled in his mind. Eli went to market/A batch of maids to curse/Took them to his new house/And laid them in the earth. What if the new apprentice house, wherever that might be, was also a tomb? Ignoring his son and this Sam, he seized the notebook and reread his notes, then went back to the *History*, turning to March 1851 – the date he'd found the 'prentice house mentioned in the Rawton Bridge Broadcaster. Nothing. Jake was mumbling anxiously, pulling at his shoulder. Chris turned back some pages, back to February and January and there it was, the clue he had been looking for. The ground plans of Undercliffe Mill Apprentice House. Work was to begin in May 1851 and the house would be completed by September.

After May 1851, there were no apprentices, so if the house was ever built, where did it stand and for what was it used?

'Dad, please say something!' Jake demanded. 'Grampa Bony had an affair in 1980 and Sam ...'

'I can't, not now, Jake.' Chris's fingers felt smooth and dry as they slipped on the thin leaves of the *History*.

'Dad, please, shut that book. This is important. Please!'

Chris shook his head. 'No,' he said, whipping around in his chair and thrusting his notebook at Jake. '*This* is important! I am nearly there –'

'Dad, for fuck's sake!' Jake's voice was low and threatening. 'Please, just turn around, Dad. I am your son; this is your sister. Her name is Samantha. Can't you even give her five minutes?'

He must not look at Jake, he must not get sucked into this new drama. Keep on track. Wheeling round and round on his red bicycle, he had repeated that mantra. Keep on track. Inigo Theramin had written a little about the design of the new Undercliff Mill Apprentice house. It was needed because the existing house, which had only been built twenty years earlier, was too small. The new house would accommodate forty apprentices, male and female, in two dormitories. Meals would be taken together. It would be erected approximately one quarter of a mile north east of the main mill building in an area known



as Lucifer's Spinney. The letters began to blur. There could only be one place that would fit this description.

'Dad, speak to us!' Jake pulled at his arm and Chris stood up in sudden understanding. His voice was louder than he had intended:

'Just leave me alone, Jake!

For a moment everything seemed suspended in the soupy warmth of the library. Chris was aware of Jake lunging forwards, of the homeless guy waking with a start, the librarian stalking across from the desk. He was conscious of the woman, Sam, shrinking away, an expression flitting across her face that he recognised, a kind of hardness at being rejected, a defence against the inevitable. In the periphery of his vision, he could see the thin leaves of Theramin's *History* flutter restlessly; all of this. But he was not prepared for Jake's arms flailing about his shoulders, for the pain that shot through his body as he instinctively flinched away, so the boy fell heavily across him. Clutching his notebook, he reeled back, barely managing to remain upright.

'Oh, God, oh, God.' Sam covered her face with her lilac gloved hands. 'What's happening?'

Jake scrambled to his feet, his face a frozen mask of shock. 'Dad, please ... I'm sorry. I was just trying to get you to ...'

But Chris had seen and heard enough. He shrugged Jake off, picked up his things and staggered to the door of the library. His cheekbone throbbed. He did not want to think about Sam and 1980, the year after his mum had left, the year when he was banished to a school the other end of the valley. He'd been expected to forget those that were missing but instead they stayed with him, all these years, pulling him back. He pushed at the door and a blast of rain and wind took his breath. The door was heavy and began to close on him before he was properly out of the building.

'Dad, come back!' Jake was at his heels, pulling at his jacket. 'We need to talk. About Sam, about Mum. Dad, we –' Chris shrugged him away. He swung his rucksack onto his shoulder and began to walk quickly away from the library. At last he knew where to look for answers. After all these years of searching, he knew where he was going: right back to the beginning.

But, as he stopped to cross Gibbetroyd Road, a police car, the police car he knew only too well, came to a standstill on the pelican crossing, causing bow waves in the standing water on the road. DI Stephens got out.

‘Christopher Adams,’ she said, her hand on his shoulder. ‘I am arresting you for the murder of your estranged wife, Cathy Adams, ‘You do not have to say anything. But it may harm your defence if you do not mention when questioned something which you later rely on in court. Anything you do say may be given in evidence.’

He tried to pull away, but the cold metal handcuff clipped around his wrist. Evidence. He had spent his life looking for evidence and now he knew where to find it, he was trapped.

# A room is never enough

Cathy Adams



Last week, I read, for the first time, Virginia Woolf's seminal essay 'A room of one's own'. I read with interest of an irate beadle, an endangered species of dons and of her aunt, Mary Seton's lack of business acumen. I learned of the supposed effect of the first world war on the hummings of poets, of soup and salmon and ducklings enjoyed during pleasant luncheons. Virginia's flow of consciousness covers many other subjects including the establishment wealth which endows our educational institutions, the time involved in the birthing and rearing of children. Her seemingly random musings and observations, are, of course, harnessed to her thesis: in order to write fiction, women need a room and some money. Men, wherever and whoever they are, can create their masterpieces without being undermined or interrupted.

Perhaps Woolf would be pleased that I have the things she believed to be the staples of a writer's life. I have a room and money to support myself as I write my fiction. But still, my creative space is constantly breached. Interruptions are many and varied. Just this morning, as I planned to write this essay, my phone rang three times in the space of an hour. My son's school wanted me to go in and discuss his recent poor performance, I was asked to read from *On Angels' Wings* by the matron of the local old people's home, who thought she wouldn't need to go through my agent 'as the lady in the Hanged Lamb says you're ever so nice', a friend wondered about lunch out at the weekend ... And then the washing machine went into spin cycle downstairs, and I knew my son's school jumper would need retrieving and hanging up to make sure it would be dry the following day. I also knew the breakfast dishes were still piled in the sink and my bed remained unmade. And then there is the tiredness. Why am I worried about these things, you wonder? Why don't I just let the phone go unanswered, leave the washing to another day and tell someone else to do the dishes? Why do I allow such trivialities to interrupt when I could just have a nap, then crack on with my writing.

I cannot, because I am female and was foolish enough to surrender to biology, couple with a man and give birth to a child. Whereas my husband can go about his day unmolested by such concerns as a ringing phone or a basket load of laundry, I have been socially conditioned to respond. The phone goes and it could be my son's school telling me he is on his way to casualty, having smashed his head open in a game of football. Someone might see the slatternly condition of my kitchen and report me to Social Services for neglecting my child, my husband might suspect me of having an affair if I don't make the bed look as though it belongs in a Travelodge. Even now, as you

## Bony

‘Humph?’ Bony stared at the man standing in his hallway, a man he recognised, but through a filter of years. Jeez, and those years sure hadn’t been kind. When was the last time he’d seen him? Ten, maybe fifteen years ago. Then he still had some hair, it was sparse and dyed a weird shade of ochre, but it was there. Now, he was bald, the rain making his head glisten, his neck bulging over his collar like a rubber dinghy. Deep gulleys had formed between his nose and mouth, emphasising his fleshy cheeks. His skin was of a disturbing hue: purple lake, a hint of olive, blending to a deep umber in the crevices. The whole of him was dripping wet.

‘Old boy!’ Humph did not meet his gaze. He was looking beyond, into the studio, his piggy eyes shifting uneasily.

‘Well, come in. You’re dripping wet. I guess you want to see my latest painting?’ Bony ushered him through to his workspace, an unspoken dread making his voice gruff. Ever since Sam had driven off, he’d expected karma to take her revenge. Now, everything seemed auspicious.

Humph stumbled into the room; It was clear that he was unwell. He moved with a shuffle, his feet hardly raising from the floor and his breath came in rasps. He stopped before the painting of the crag and turned. ‘Bony, cut the damned frivolities. Is she here?’

‘Who?’ Bony blinked at his old friend. It was too early in the morning for mind-reading.

‘Sam, for God’s sake. Sammy –’

‘Sam.’ The name on Bony’s lips felt different now he knew what it meant. ‘No. I think she’s gone.’

‘Gone!’ Humph roared. ‘Gone? Where the hell is she? She went off radar – totally off radar last night. Not heard a bloody word. She *promised* me.’

‘Jeez, take it easy.’ Bony put a hand on Humph’s arm, only to be shaken violently away.

‘I knew something would happen. Something would go wrong. But she wanted to come here. She was so determined and I ... I said I’d fix it up, make it work. It’s not as

though I fucking wanted to. Christ, Bony Adams. I've been on your back for fifty years!' As he spoke, Humph shambled around the studio, swiping paints off the table to the floor, flicking through the stacks of canvases propped against walls, pulling photos and sketches from the wall. His outburst was almost loud enough to drown the sound of the heavy downpour pelting the glass roof. 'I wanted her to wait a while. To think about things. But no, just like her mother, she went high-tailing off and I had to –' He stopped, evidently out of breath. His face was pale with a bluish cast.

'Whoa!' Bony bellowed. 'Slow down, Humph. Take a seat, I'll skin us up a joint. We can talk when you're feeling –'

For a moment, Humph stopped and fixed his tiny eyes on Bony, as though he was some kind of headcase. Then he seemed to pull himself together. 'I don't do that shit any more, Bony. I'm not a fucking student. I'd rather have a drink. Whisky, if you can run to it. Neat.'

'Okay. Please, sit. Humph, man, you look terrible.' Bony indicated the sofa that only hours ago Sam had graced. He hardly knew her and yet already he was missing her. Humph slumped down.

'I've been better. '

Bony busied himself looking for the half bottle of the cheap blend Chrissie had bought him for Christmas. He'd never been much of a scotch drinker and that stuff was fit only as brake fluid, but with a bit of luck it would calm Humph down long enough for him to tell him why he was so wired. Keeping the bottle well hidden, he poured a mug of 'Highland Blend' at the sink and handed it to Humph who knocked it back in one and held it out for more. 'Okay, tell us what the problem is, man.'

'Sam ... Sam has disappeared,' Humph said. He hunched over. 'It's been such a shock. For all of us.' He groped in his pocket and pulled out a pill bottle, opened it up and put one in his mouth.

'She hasn't disappeared.' Bony sat down beside his old friend and began to skin up. 'She was here yesterday, and, the thing is, she told me something. Something that ... I wasn't expecting. And I guess that maybe you didn't know –'

Humph sighed. 'So, she blurted it right out, did she? Fuck you!'

‘What’s got into you?’ Bony shrunk away as Humph loomed over him, fist pulled back like a piston about to strike. ‘Look, I blew it. Yesterday, she told me I was her father and I blew it.’ He stared into Humph’s bulging throat that was now a florid crimson laced with blue and thought again of the day on the moors. The last time he saw Ailsa. Nothing made any sense. ‘So, you knew ... All this time, you knew I had a daughter – that Ailsa had my child and you never thought to mention it?’

Humph coughed. His lips were a Windsor blue, face suffused with a crazy violet. ‘She wanted to find you. To talk to you. Her mother –’

‘Ailsa – you know her still?’ Bony’s mind whirled with implications. He lit the spliff and took a deep toke. Why had Ailsa never told him about Sam? She’d gone off to London and never contacted him again ... Had she gone with Humphrey Lyde?

‘Ailsa died three weeks ago.’ Now Humph crumpled in on himself. His eyes disappeared in folds of flesh. He took a deep, shuddery breath. Bony put a tentative hand on his arm. Outside, the rainstorm seemed to be growing stronger. The windows were streaming. The Crag was hidden away.

‘That’s a bummer.’ Bony blew smoke up to the glass roof and waited. Humph took a deep breath and grabbed the joint from between Bony’s fingers. He rammed it in his mouth, inhaled handed it back, then took another tablet from the bottle.

‘I married her – Ailsa.’

‘You – *married*? You sure kept that quiet.’ Bony stared up at the glass roof, at the charcoal smears of black and grey clouds. ‘How come you never told me?’ He tried to remember 1980, the Burnside days, but they had been so busy. There’d been all the trouble with Chrissie. They’d phoned Bony from the school. Three times he’d had to go and collect him. His son had not fitted in. Boys singled him out because he wouldn’t play football or rugby. And Bony had tried to do the right thing, but it meant reverting to type, to his own childhood, his father saying, ‘You face things, boy. You face up to life.’ So, for a while, Bony rushed between Burnside University, his studio and his son in the school he was working so hard to pay for, feeling constantly guilty that he couldn’t give any the attention they deserved. The truth was that when Ailsa had gone, he’d scarcely given her a second thought. Another child would have been unthinkable.

‘I offered her a lift. To London,’ Humph said now. ‘After that day, remember, that pub on the moors. God, I hated you –’

‘Hated?’ Bony moved away from Humph; his words stung. ‘Man, we were friends. We still are, aren’t we ...?’

‘You never saw it did you? Never got it that you had everything. That day, on the moor, I saw you, Bony Adams, for what you really are: a selfish bastard who creams the best from life but gives nothing in return. Come on, let’s face it, you married Sylvie when she was young and full of talent. You sucked the life out of her then you drove her away. She was desperate, you know. *Desperate ...*’ Humph coughed into his handkerchief, wiped his mouth and continued. ‘There was one time when I came up to see you ...Mid-seventies? You were right in the middle of your nudes in interiors phase ...’

Bony shut his eyes. Where had the years gone, why couldn’t he remember Humph coming to visit him?

‘You wanted me to take a look at the paintings. They were a new departure for you at the time. I couldn’t have given a damn for your work! I only agreed to represent you to keep an eye on Sylvie.’ He began to cough, spluttering smoke into the already thick atmosphere. The wind and rain roared around the studio. ‘That night, the night I arrived, you were engrossed in one of your works of genius and never even had the decency to say hello. Sylvie and I drank the Chateau Neuf du Pape I’d brought, sitting on your sofa. The weather was just like this...’ He pointed vaguely to the glass roof. ‘You know, that night, she begged me to take her back to London,’ Humph said. ‘Begged. She was a mess... She hadn’t worked for months. Didn’t you realise that at college, every man and half the women were in love with her; for her ceramics and her exquisite drawing as much as her looks? You won her and what did you do? Bring her to this shithole where it never stops raining, then get her up the duff. She was stuck here with a kid to look after a while you ...You were so full of yourself. All your plans for exhibitions and so on. You never understood that every time you finished a new piece of work, a little bit more of her died, did you, you never even fucking saw her!’

‘Man, this is about Ailsa, not Sylvie!’ Bony shouted over Humph’s railings and the battering storm. ‘You married Ailsa when –’

Humph heaved himself up to a standing position. The colour had drained from his face now and his skin looked a nasty grey; grey as the dreary rain-streaked windows. ‘Sylvie was losing her mind; did you know that? She thought she heard ghosts, screaming in the night coming from the woods –’

Bony zoned out, remembering Cathy saying almost the same thing about herself: *Why would Chris bring me here to the miserable place, full of ghosts?* He turned. ‘Humph, please, what about Ailsa? She was pregnant.’

‘She needed help.’

Bony stared at his old friend. The anger and bluster had drained away leaving a defeated old guy with no fight left in him. ‘What do you mean?’ A branch, evidently loosened by the storm outside, slid across the glass roof making a horrible scraping noise. Humph sighed and slowly sat down again.

‘She told me about the pregnancy on the way to London. She was distraught and I ... I offered to marry her. ’

‘But she was having my child; didn’t I have a right to know?’

‘You were all over the place, Bony. A selfish bastard. Not fit to care for Ailsa or to bring up another child in this hell hole of a place. I, on the other hand, was in my mid-thirties, wealthy; my dealership was going from strength to strength. I could offer Ailsa stability, security ... ’ He teetered forward, holding out his arms like a tightrope walker. ‘And she was a beautiful woman. But when Sam was born, well ... I wasn’t prepared for how I’d feel. She was everything to me.’

‘Was? Man, she’s still alive. I bet she’s still in Rawton, did you try The Fleece? She was booked in there till the end of the week.’

Humph leant forward. His voice was thick with emotion. ‘I wouldn’t change a thing. I swear. If it all happened again, I wouldn’t do a thing different. Only –’

‘What?’

‘I wish Ailsa had never told Sam the truth. I wish she’d died keeping the secret of who Sam’s real father is. There was no reason for her to know. Now, Sam wants *you* ...’



‘Jeez.’ Bony grappled for his tin of tobacco. ‘She doesn’t want me, Humph. She’s just curious. It’s all so long ago. Who’s to say that someone else isn’t her real father. Ailsa was a looker, after all ...’

Humph sat back, his head on the backrest of the sofa. ‘You fucking shit. You were the only one who’d ever touched Ailsa ... And Sam. Sam’s hair was red as a lit match, before she started dying it. Your hair, Bony.’

Bony stared up at the darkening sky, heard the crack of thunder overhead and knew that this was it. This was karma and she bore the face of Humphrey Lyde.

Don't listen to that bunch of dollymops; "she's no better than she ought to be". To right I'm not. But I'm no worse either. I'm the apple of Daddy's eye - or I was - Easy to forget that once you're picking up the daisies, everything is in front of you. So, to my story, my bildungsroman (is it?) - that's what you're after, is it? A good, coming-of-age who pops her clogs before the bell. Die young, stay pretty. Debbie Harry sing. Shame she did advice.

CATHY ADAMS  
348 72 160X  
'THE WOLF'

I was born on 3<sup>rd</sup> November Elizabeth (nee Murphy) and her Donahue. Elizabeth died of the shortly after and I was left to along with my twin(?) brothers - were you at the time. Maybe 'raised' is a bit misleading. Da worked up at Lye's as a piecer - six while six in winter, longer in summer. For me a cat

### THE TWENTY FOUR

#### Chorus

We are the twenty-four  
The lesser history chose  
to ignore,  
sold down the river by  
a lying wee whore  
and we're coming back  
to haunt you.

We are the twenty four  
Back from the dead, after  
all we've endured  
Rendered as witless  
victims and more  
we're coming back to  
haunt you

Face us, the twenty-four,

See the skulls at our  
fingertips, hear us, implore  
Remember our fate -  
For all her gardens -  
It's us come back to  
haunt you.

Avenge us, the twenty four  
Left for dead on the  
god forsaken?? moor  
Lain in the earth, of  
his wind-released tor,  
we're here, we're come  
to haunt you.

## Jake

‘I’m going to pay my hotel bill and get my case, then I’ll drive back to London.’ Sam said quietly. She was sitting opposite Jake in the bar of the Fleece, where she’d been staying. It had been the only place to go once the librarian had asked them to leave. It was warm, the fire roaring, a lunchtime crowd was beginning to gather, glad of the heat to dry off their rain sodden coats. ‘You’d better make things okay with your dad. He seemed pretty upset when you hit –’

‘Oh, he’s always like that,’ Jake said, finishing his beer. ‘Come on, one for the road?’

She shook her head and stood up. ‘I’m driving. I think the coffees have just about got rid of my hangover. I’m not going to start again.’

He shrugged and felt in the pocket of his jeans for his change. He may as well get hammered.

‘I shouldn’t have told Bony so soon,’ she said, pulling on her red coat. ‘All those adoption websites tell you to take things slowly, not jump in with both feet. Dad ... my *adopted* dad tried to warn me. He told me Bony wouldn’t want to know. He told me that Bony just used my mum. and when I said that I had to find out for myself, he tried to protect me by setting up the *Vite* as a way to get to know him first. He said that once I realised what Bony was like, then I’d run a mile ... But I went too fast. And I hurt Dad – the proper Dad who brought me up.’

‘He’ll get over it,’ Jake went up to the bar, slammed his change down and turned back to her. ‘And you are best out of Bony’s life, believe me. Sounds like your dad is okay. Go back home, forget all about us. If you stay here, you’ll end up like everyone else. I tell you, I am out as soon as school finishes next summer.’

‘Well, I am glad I met you, Jake,’ she said, brushing a light kiss on his cheek. He could smell her powdery scent. ‘And you’re right. I’ll go back home. I was stupid to come here. Stupid to ever think Bony would want to know me. If you’re ever in London, why don’t you look us up - my number’s on here.’ She put a card in his hand which he stuck in the pocket of his jeans, then pulled her mobile out of her pocket. ‘Oh damn, my mobile’s out of charge.’

‘You wanna ring someone?’ He held his phone out.

She hesitated. ‘Oh, it’s okay. Just my dad. He said to keep in touch, but I’ll see him soon enough, I guess.’

‘Bye ... Auntie.’ He grinned. ‘I’ll have another pint and –’

‘Weren’t you meant to meet someone today?’ She said, suddenly. ‘Last night. A girl rang. You said you were –’

‘Oh, freak, Maddie!’ Jake rammed his phone back in his pocket. ‘I’m late. Got to go!’

‘Wow, your face has gone all red. She must be something, then, this girl?’

He smiled tightly. Maddie was something; something he’d nearly lost. He waved for the last time at Sam and ran out into the rain.

Maddie was sitting in the shelter near the skate park looking well annoyed and no wonder. It was still pissing down, and the park looked as though it would be underwater at any moment. He ducked under the concrete arch, the hangout of drunks and druggies. It stank of wee and crude black letters had been sprayed across some more professional tags on the wall. Typical. Rawton Bridge couldn’t even get graffiti right.

‘Maddie, I’m sorry. I got –’

‘Nearly an hour, I’ve sat here. If I get pneumonia, I’ll blame you.’ She was soaked through, her hair hanging in dark curls about her face.

He sat down next to her, the beer making him brave. He hardly noticed the cold of the concrete through his jeans. She was so gorgeous, even drenched to the skin. If only he could kiss her now. If only he dared put his arms right round her and –

‘Two things,’ she said, ‘then I’ll go home and get dry.’

‘Okay?’ He gripped the rough edge of the seat.

‘Number one, I’m sorry. For what I said the other day.’

He stared out at the sodden park, up to Undercliffe Woods behind. A freezing wind was blowing the rain almost horizontal. He reached for her hand. Her woollen glove was wet through.

‘The second thing is this. I picked it up from your drive the day we went back to get your stuff, but you were so upset when you got that text, I just shoved it in my pocket. I don’t know if it has anything to do with anything, but I thought you should have it ...

With her free hand, she pulled a soggy piece of cardboard out of her pocket. He immediately recognised the London bus on the front. ‘I found one like this in Mum’s room last night,’ he said, remembering his dash to find Sam some clothes. He turned the card over, there was nothing written on the back, but now he looked, on the front there was a printed name and number, small and discreet: Fountain Fine Art and Literary Agency. Director – Humphrey Lyde. He shrugged. The name was familiar somehow, but he couldn’t remember where from.

‘Do you think it’s something to do with your mum’s death?’ she asked.

‘Dunno.’ He felt in his back pocket for the other card from Mum’s room but grabbed Sam’s card at the same time. He looked down at them frowning. ‘That’s weird. They’re all the same.’ Three cards on his knee, three slices of London bus. The same number three times.

‘You’re gonna have to take them to the police,’ she said. ‘I’ll come with you. And what about your phone?’

‘Phone?’ he couldn’t take his eyes off her face. It was pink, full of animation. Her eyes were shining.’

‘You still getting those messages – the ninna nanna things?’

He nodded. Just that morning there had been one, as well as the usual, ‘you know that I am here for you.’ He’d been too hungover to take much notice. And in a way, a weird kind of creepy way, they were reassuring, these messages from his mum’s phone, as though she was still alive. As though there was still time to make amends. He showed her the latest message: *Ninna, Nanna, the wolf is in my sights*. ‘What the hell does it mean?’

Maddie shrugged. ‘You will have to tell the police. You said yourself, whoever has your mum’s phone is probably the one . . .’

‘Okay, I will, though I doubt it’ll make a lot of difference.’ He sighed. The rain had stopped, and a weird yellowish light had crept across the park, making the sodden grass

shine and the sky glow a kind of purple. He felt heavy, as though a massive weight was crushing him down and as he looked up, he knew why. The steep hills on either side made the sky look like a coffin lid, black and oppressive, trapping everyone in Rawton. And yet, beside him, Maddie didn't seem bothered by it. Even here, sitting beneath a shitty spray-painted concrete arch, she shone. He squeezed her hand, smiling as the water trickled from her wet glove. 'Thanks for coming. It . . . It means a lot.'

'I have to go home soon,' she said, but she didn't take her hand away. 'I promised Mum I'd babysit for our Stacey this evening. It's not often she and Dad get to go out.'

'Okay, I'll walk you.' He turned to her, touched her face and pressed his lips hard onto hers, the wet and cold making it all feel kind of awkward. He realised he was shivering uncontrollably but couldn't work out if it was because of his thin wet jacket, lack of sleep or because at last, he and Maddie were back where they should be: together. Their teeth clicked together, Maddie's wet hair dripped down his neck, the cold of the concrete seat seeped upwards through his body. He hugged her tight, not caring about any of it. She was the most beautiful girl he'd ever known, and she was in his arms.

Eventually, she pulled away. 'You need to get to the police station with that phone,' she reminded. 'It's important. It's on the way back to mine. And after, maybe you can come up and help me with the babysitting? It would be good to have some company. I'd like some advice, too. About universities.'

He straightened his clothes, a small thrill of pleasure making his heart pound. She had actually listened to him! 'I don't know why you ever thought working in a burger bar for the rest of your life would be okay.'

'I didn't. Not really. It's just that no one from my family ever got further than A levels so it's just not expected. And with Dad losing his job, they'll need me to help out.' She strode out across the old bowling green. He pulled her back for a moment, moved in close for another kiss. Then they carried on towards the park gates, their feet sinking into the boggy ground. The yellow light had darkened.

'Both mine went,' he said. 'It's where they met. Mum never finished her degree, though she still became a writer. That's when everything went tits up. Maybe education's not all it's cracked up to be ...' They were now at the park gates. Everything was quiet,

and still as though the whole valley was holding its breath. A fork of lightening suddenly split the sky, momentarily strobing the town with pure white light.

‘That was kind of amazing,’ Maddie said, snuggling up against him. ‘Like our own light show. It was almost worth coming out for ...’

‘That all?’ he demanded in mock hurt. He took Maddie in his arms again and kissed her.

‘You know what I think,’ she said, pulling away. Hail was now pelting down on them, stinging his face and hands.

‘We make a run for it?’ he said.

‘Well yes ... No, that’s not what I mean. I think that university has nothing to do with whether you stay married or not. What matters is your family, the place you come from. They drag you back or spur you on. Like my mum, for instance. She grew up in a children’s home and I think that made her a better mum. She so wanted to create a lovely family for us ...’

‘You sound like Dad, hooked on the past.’

‘Come on,’ She pulled her scarf up around her face. ‘I’ll race you to the police station.’

Plate 31





## Chris

‘We’ve uncovered some new evidence.’ DI Stephens glared at Chris across the table. There was none of the softness he had noticed in her voice before. Even her hair seemed more rigid than usual, framing her face with straight lines; her dark eyes were hard as stones. Sergeant Jones sat beside her, frowning as she jabbed at the buttons on the radio clipped to her lapel.

He gazed at the familiar water cooler and sighed. So close. He only had to check the co-ordinates for Lucifer’s Spinney and begin digging.

‘Do you want to wait for your brief to turn up?’ Sergeant Jones asked.

He shook his head. He didn’t need a lawyer. He just wanted to get this all over with as soon as possible.

‘This.’ DI Stephens pushed a bagged document towards him. He looked down, not knowing what to expect, not interested. As he took in the meaning of this new information, it seemed the foundations of the life he had built since his mother left finally crumbled beneath him. Outside, water deluged into the little yard. The flood sirens began to wail, an uncanny sound resounding across the valley in an echo of war.

‘Good job we’re not near the river,’ Sergeant Jones muttered. ‘Poor buggers down there have about an hour to get out.’

Chris couldn’t focus, no matter how hard he tried, the words beyond Cathy’s name on the document swam out of his vision.

‘Alex Thomas mentioned your controlling behaviour in her statement. In my experience, psychological abuse often leads to the physical kind,’ DI Stephens said in a new clipped tone. She touched the new evidence again, but he didn’t look down, instead he focused on the edge of the door. It wasn’t quite straight and there was a bigger gap at the top than the bottom. ‘For the tape, Mr Adams is not looking at the document, which is a legal abortion agreement signed by Cathy Adams and two doctors in June 2012. This was four weeks after the publication of her novel, just after she put the house up for sale and a month after you lost your job at the college.’

He bit into his thumbnail. ‘I didn’t know anything about it.’

Sgt Jones gave a cheerless laugh. ‘Maybe not, but it would be good to hear what you think.’

He swallowed. His mouth was dry. Focus. He pictured the trike going round and round, the feel of the rutted ground beneath the wheels.

‘Mr Adams, please answer my question. Your wife had an abortion in the June of 2012, why didn’t you know?’

Had he known, in those weeks before it all slipped away from him and his mind broke? Had Cathy shown signs that she was pregnant? Dead wife, dead child, the past was slipping through him like a shadow; only the siren’s wail alone kept him tethered to the here and now.

‘We spoke to Doctor Vincent of Rawton Bridge Group Practice who referred your wife for the procedure,’ DI Stephens said. ‘And he had some interesting observations to share with us. Cathy was very distressed when she came to him. She was six weeks pregnant. She claimed that she had been raped.’

Chris closed his eyes, imagined himself sinking down through the mud into the millstone grit below the town, the bedrock that had been there millennia before Elijah Thomas, before men and their paltry concerns sullied the land. Procedure – that was what they called it now, was it, the murder of your own baby?

‘She was frightened that her husband might find out about the child and force her to have it. She claimed she had been raped by her husband, Christopher. By you.’

2012, that spring day, the sun slanting through the kitchen window. Was that what he became, a rapist, an abuser of women? He should have felt some hope, seeing the pockets of bluebells in the garden, the first roses beginning to bud but a poison had entered his life; some darkness that swept across the valley from Alex Wadsworth’s farm. Cathy was changed beyond belief. Her clothes were different, her hair cut in a new shorter style. She was rarely at home. Then, she had asked him to leave. The reasons had been vague: she needed space, he needed space; he had to get on with his work, she had to get on with hers. She couldn’t breathe. She was putting the house up for sale, cutting her losses and

going back to Leeds. He hadn't known what to say. After all these years together and she was cutting her losses. Just what was that supposed to mean?

But there was Jake, he had argued. He was young still, just coming into his teens. Think of the effects. He knew them only too well, cycling round on his little red trike waiting for Mummy to come home but she never did. But Jake would stay with Cathy. It was all arranged. Jake would be fine about it. And that was it, a fait accompli. His family was to disappear out of his life as though it had never existed.

The morning it happened, he had woken on the sofa in the lounge, his neck cricked, his mouth dry from all the whisky the night before. Cathy had been in much earlier before she went into town to pick up a proof of the new cover for *On Angel's Wings*. She'd flung open the curtains and asked him just when he was going to move out. It had hit him afresh, all he was losing, all she was taking away.

Still in yesterday's clothes at ten in the morning, he waited for the kettle to boil and heard the click of her key in the latch. She breezed into the kitchen, her flowery perfume wafting ahead of her, a new scent she had only recently taken to wearing; it smelled expensive.

'Chris, you're still here?'

He nodded, ashamed. 'I'll get a shower in a moment.'

She came around to face him. She was glowing. Everything was on the up for Cathy Adams. Her book was out, her life was sparkling. Beside her he felt dull and worthless.

'Chris, I wish you could understand,' she came to face him, put her hands on his shoulders. She was so close, the new perfume seemed to dominate his senses. 'It's for the best. I always hated it here at Rawton Bridge. You love it, I know. Your dad is here; your whole life is here. ... I feel as though I am drowning.' She was so close. He took her face in his hands and pulled it towards him in a kiss.

She responded gently, by pulling away, saying, 'It's too late for that.' And then the full weight of his loss descended on him. The last twenty-two years of his life peeled away revealing his old raw student self; the motherless boy struggling with depression. He kissed her hard, hoping to remind her. She couldn't leave him, not after all these years, not after all they had shared.

She fought him, pummelling against his back to break free, but he pushed her down onto the cold kitchen tiles. His body knew every inch of hers. He kept his eyes closed the whole time. As he pulled up her skirt, he thought he sensed some give in her and held her all the more tightly, pressing his lips over hers. He loved her, he knew that now. Loved her in a way that was fiercer, more passionate than any love he had known before or since. He couldn't stop. He pushed into her, wanting her to hold him, to forgive, but she lay still until he was finished. Then she stood up, brushed herself down and left the kitchen without a word. He stayed there a little longer, trying to stifle the tears that kept leaking down his cheeks.

'Did you rape your wife, Mr Adams?' DI Stephens was insisting. 'Did you force her to have sex with you?'

Focus. Round and round, a dead wife replaced, a dead child. The blood rushed to his face. There was nothing to say. They had their evidence, he had his, emblazoned into his memory, firing between synapses. Dead wife, missing mother, missing girls.

'Christopher!' Sergeant Jones bashed her hand onto the table, making a loud crack. 'Did you rape Cathy?'

'Dr Vincent thought it significant enough to note down Cathy's claim,' DI Stephens said. 'The timing of the pregnancy corresponds to the time in which, according to Alex Wadsworth, Cathy asked you to leave the family home.'

Somewhere in the background, the front door of the police station opened and slammed shut, the sound of laughter, animated voices. A car drove slowly past outside, the wheels making a wet slipping sound on the tarmac. The siren continued to wail. Time seemed suspended, viscous, an entity to move through with leaden limbs, past and present becoming one.

<p><u>es capture</u></p> <p>he yard at the back of Josiah barn. Callum ave chase but unfortunate beggar was seen from the scene at Milnrow. His has made a plea to the court mercy as he is of feeble mind.</p>	<p><u>"Returned to Parish"</u></p> <p>Local mill-owner, Elijah Thomas, who last Thursday afternoon laid the foundation stone for the new Rawton Bridge Library, today informed the Courier of the return of twenty-five "pauper" apprentice girls to the Parish of Liverpool. The girls, now aged between nineteen and twenty-three years have been instructed and employed by Mr Thomas since 1841 and are now fully experienced in the worsted trade.</p>	<p><u>"Willing" Jim</u> <u>bail</u></p> <p>Several years have since this public viewed James M the damage his inflicting on the of Nelson Street great misgiving must now report misdeameanors. the hound in question the years in which ter was in prison sister, Martha, this period not self disagreeable son. On return</p>
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## Bony

Humph had been out for two hours, head lolling back on Bony's old sofa, mouth hanging open and emitting snores that competed with the thunder outside. Whether it was the joint, the whisky or the cocktail of pills that had knocked him out, was up for debate. He never could keep a lid on his impulses. But maybe the kip would do him good.

Bony skinned up and sat beside his painting, finding its physical proximity comforting. This was where he felt the most real, in his studio, the smell of linseed oil filling his nostrils, a piece of art to be completed. Here, age meant nothing, the past even less. Here, with his work, he could just *be*. Sam was wrong to believe that a broken heart would bleed into the work of an artist. Broken hearts, anger and resentment belonged to the soap opera world of real life. A painting was a pure thing, a bare fact that eluded Humph. Tragic that he had married a woman more to get back at an old friend than out of love. That he had brought up that friend's child as his own. Bony loaded a brush with lamp black, mixing a thick oily impasto. No wonder the guy couldn't paint. He couldn't see what was under his nose.

He smeared black shadows into the Crag, imbuing the rock with an inky depth, a three-dimensional quality that hadn't been there before. The flood siren screamed in the valley. Beneath his feet the rock of the hillside was rumbling. He brushed a tendril of greasy grey hair from his face, feeling once again gripped by the muse. She was a capricious whore at the best of times, today she came to him in her most seductive garb: angry, passionate, demanding blood. The rumbling increased, even the house was possessed by her. Bony's brush bit into the canvas, sculpting caves and crevices into the crag. Today he would finish this work and it would be the best thing he ever created.

'You are so cocky, aren't you, so confident in your own genius?' Humph had woken; he was on his feet now, shuffling towards him.'

Bony didn't turn around. He pushed black into the purple clouds with the bristles of his brush.

'I came here to finish it. You do realise that, old man?'

Bony continued to paint, Humph's words barely registered. The brush felt like a baton, conducting the turmoil of the storm through to the canvas.

'At least have the decency to look at me, you fucking parasite.'

Bony could feel Humph behind him, his hot breath on his neck. He could hear it churning through scarred lungs.

'Year ago, the Guardian printed an article about you and Cathy. There was a picture of you both, the artist and the novelist arm in arm. In the article, you said, 'she's the daughter I never had.' I kept it, see. All these years it has been in my house and every time I looked at it ... It made me furious. *You* had a daughter. Samantha Fountain was the daughter you never had – not this novelist woman. But then, I used to think, more fool you, missing out on my beautiful girl. Because she was *my* girl, Bony. Sam was my daughter until you took her away.'

Bony stopped, his brush poised at the apex of the crag. 'I don't know what the hell you are talking about, Humph.'

'An eye for an eye. A daughter for a daughter.'

'My God, you are not saying what I think –'

'You're not surprised? Your Cathy had tasted success, but she was still hungry enough to be interested in a deal with me. Nina Nana No.'

'What?'

'If I give you the black wolf, for a whole year he'll keep you. She wanted more, Bony. More than your whelp of a son could give her. More than you could give. She wanted real recognition, money, power!'

At last Humph's meaning began to sink in. As the crag darkened, so did the implication of what he was saying. Bony's jaw began to ache and yet he was unable to turn around.

'You stole my daughter,' Humph concluded.

Bony gently replaced his paintbrush on the table. 'Jeez, man, I never meant to. I never even knew she existed. And what about the *Vite*? Humph, it was you who got us together!'

‘It was a way to keep a check on you. It was ... Hell, I don’t know what I was doing. Driving her into your arms and hoping she’d realise what a shit you are.’

‘What does it matter, Humph? All this time, you’ve been bringing her up.’ A crack of lightening lit the studio with a weird yellow glow and at last Bony was able to turn from his finished work. As he moved, the edge of his shirt caught a glass of turpentine which splashed black across the studio floor. He faced Humph and looked him in his small, piggy eyes. ‘We’re both old men, Humph, and I suspect dying may not be all it’s cracked up to be.’ Death would come, but it was important to have something to leave behind, something that future generations would wonder about. It didn’t matter what the hell was going on in his mind, in his life. The work was all. Painting on canvas. His ideas and dreams made tangible, his only legacy.

Humph coughed. He looked bad, florid and sweating, though it was anything but warm in the studio, with the wind and damp forcing its way through the fissures in the old building. ‘Bony, I’ve come here to finish it once and for all.’

‘Finish what?’ Before Bony had taken in what was happening, Humph lurched towards him. But then the world went out of kilter, everything tilted. One minute Humph was before him, the next he had slipped and was lying on his back at Bony’s feet, gasping for air like a land-locked fish.

‘You, old man, you’re finished,’ he managed before closing his eyes.

Bony stared down, fascinated by the play of sulphurous light on Humph’s clenched fingers as they slowly uncurled. A brown pill bottle, a few yellow pills pattered onto the studio floor.

‘No!’ Bony was down on his knees. He grabbed the bottle from Humph’s hand: Citalopram, the label said. DO NOT EXCEED STATED DOSE. Humph’s breathing was laboured, sweat glistened on his forehead. ‘How many?’ Bony shouted. He remembered a guy back at a Soho party in the sixties, some hippy who overdosed on uppers. One of the guests was a nurse and she hoisted the guy onto his side and told someone to ring for help. Shame was that everyone was too scared of getting busted. Had the guy died? He couldn’t remember. He’d been too wasted to do anything about it. Not now, though. He shoved Humph onto his side and grabbed the phone.



‘Keep him talking. Keep him awake,’ the woman from the ambulance service told him. ‘We’ll be there as soon as we can.’

‘Come on, man,’ Bony said, slapping Humph’s cheeks. ‘Don’t go dying on me.’

‘Fuck you,’ Humph rasped. ‘*I’m* not going to die!’

But by the time the paramedics had turned up, Humph was unconscious again; his face a symphony of grey tones.

‘Will he be okay?’ Bony asked.

The man smiled, patted Bony’s arm. ‘I’m sure he’ll be fine. It’s you I’m more worried about, Mr Adams. You sure you don’t want to come in the ambulance back to civilization? You’ll be cut off up here, soon. The valley’s under water and it’ll be a Noah’s ark job if you end up flooded.’

‘I’ll sit it out,’ Bony said. ‘I’ve got a painting to complete.’


When they’d gone, Bony lit himself a joint and lay on the chaise longue. He was tired, bone- tired. Had Humph killed Cathy? Should he have said something to the paramedics, told the police? Was the man he’d always thought of as a friend really capable of murder? But then he remembered the accusations, the hatred in Humph’s eyes and knew the answer. Still he was paralysed by the realisation, unable to act. But Humph was not going anywhere for the time being. The cops could be called later, when the storm passed. For now, he would let the sensi do its work as the wind lullabied him to sleep.

## Plate 33

Rawton Bridge Flooding

www.victoriansonline.co.uk/freakweatherpatterns\_ .ml

### The 'Indundation' of 1851



[Freak Weather Forum](#)  
[Pennine Storms 1875](#)

THE RAWTON BRIDGE FLOOD 1851

A tinted and highly stylised view of the flooding around Rawton Bridge, thought to have been painted by local artist. George Ackroyd. The river rose over ten feet above its usual level and engulfed the town in a matter of minutes after a month of heavy rain.

## Chris

‘And you’re certain you don’t want a solicitor?’ Sergeant Jones asked.

Chris thought he detected some softening in her. He nodded. There was no point. They had already accepted that he deserved whatever punishment was coming for him.

‘Alex Wadsworth called in again this morning,’ Sergeant Jones said. Chris could feel her staring, watching his reaction. ‘She’d remembered something else, something possibly significant.’ Her voice lowered, became confidential. Now he knew that this was a rehearsed speech, designed to produce some effect in him. The two women had gone through this already, planned to trip him up or confuse him into some confession. ‘Alex had been telling Cathy about her family history research,’ Sergeant Jones went on. ‘Cathy was interested and started using some of the information for her new novel, *The Wolf*. So much of it is about the history of Rawton Bridge.’

He leaned forward, braced for the blow that was to come. She pushed the envelope towards him. Suddenly calm, he pulled out the thick piece of card inside and found himself staring at a woman in sensuous pose, a woman scantily clad, aware of her own beauty and power. A sticker on the front proclaimed this as one ‘Eliza Thomas’.

Like a magician about to reveal the extent of her skill, Jones, produced another piece of paper, a scroll this time, from a file on her lap. ‘There’s the family tree that goes with it.’

Chris’s hands trembled so much that he couldn’t hold the photograph steady and had to put it down onto the table. Jones unrolled the second document. He scanned rows of names, printed in immaculate copperplate and traced the dead: in 1851 Eliza Donahue married Elijah Thomas and they had six children. Mary, their youngest, was born in 1870 and married John Greenwood in 1896. Their son, William, married Sarah Black in 1934 and their daughter, Jean wed Laurence Wadsworth and gave birth to Alexandra in 1965. Alex Wadsworth, the woman who had stolen his wife, corrupted her, was a direct descendent of Eliza Donahue, the Eliza Donahue who had been stepping out with John Brierley of Lye’s Mill. Brierley had been arrested for attacking Elijah on the morning they were setting off to Southampton to board a schooner. No wonder Thomas had been

attacked. He was leaving the country with a young woman who was promised to another. If the proof wasn't staring him in the face, he would think it was a bad joke.

Was this, finally, the end of his search? Would all the girls turn up married to local men, whose descendants populated the town of Rawton to this day?

DI Stephens watched his every move. She gave him a moment or two to process the information and then launched into him once more. 'Christopher. Did you rape Cathy?'

The detective's words made no sense to him. They were empty sounds echoing through the room from far away. No wonder Elijah Thomas had taken Eliza on his grand tour. She was probably the reason for the tour in the first place. Men like Thomas didn't like leaving their wool or cotton empires to holiday abroad but maybe he had fallen in love and needed to circumvent the conditions of Eliza's indenture, which would have forbade removing her from the country. By registering her with the ship as his daughter, he had managed to avoid this problem. He no doubt married her while abroad and when he returned could announce that he had met her in France or Italy. His daughter had been dead for years, so she didn't need accounting for. He forced himself to look once more at the photograph. There was something brazen about Eliza's pose, defiant. The breath caught in his chest as his gaze travelled beyond her to the apprentice house, a good few metres away. He recognised the lintel above the front door, the ornate architrave. The apprentice house, now known as Coldwater House, Bony Adams studio – his own childhood home.

'For the tape, Christopher is looking at the photograph provided by Alex Wadsworth,' Jones said, cutting through the silence.

DI Stephens thumped the table, causing the picture to jump. "Christopher Adams, did you realise that one of the reasons Cathy saw so much of Alex Wadsworth was because of her research. And yours?' Round and round. Dead wife, dead child. Missing mother missing girls. "I think you did rape your wife, Christopher. I think you raped her because you couldn't control her. And I believe you killed her for the same reason.'

Chris stared at the ill-fitting door. The flood siren shrieked, filling the room with anxiety. Voices sounded somewhere in the station. A clock ticked the minutes down. When he thought of Cathy, she was dressed as a millworker, her image shadowy and

difficult to grasp. Round and round. The wheels of the trike on the herringbone path. The door opened. Another young man entered, and the two police women were talking. A sudden sense of urgency disturbed the air. A young police constable walked into the room carrying a file. DI Stephens looked grave, glanced back at Chris. Suddenly, he was alone.



Mrs Eliza Thomas, posing as Desdemona  
for the Rawton Bridge amateur Operatic  
and Dramatic society's production of  
Othello in 1853.

*Victorian woman, with arms held over her head, wearing loose fitting dress in sepia colour*  
[photo] private collection, Halifax

## Jake

‘I told you to hand the phone in when you got that message at your house, days ago,’ Maddie said. ‘Detective Rachel was really annoyed. And I like her. She really wants to help you.’

‘I know.’ Jake shivered. If anything, the rain was getting worse. The whole street was running like a river and people in wellies were sandbagging nearby shops. A guy was fitting a metal shutter to the door of the club opposite the police station. The noise of water was so loud he had to shout. ‘We’d better get up to my Grampa’s. It’s nearer than your house and I don’t think we’ll make it over the river to that side of the valley anyway.’

‘Mum will be doing her nut wondering where I am, though. I promised I’d come straight back.’

‘You’d better phone her.’ As he said this, Jake felt as though someone was squeezing the breath out of him. He remembered just what it was like to have a mother who gave a shit about whether you got home in the rain or not. Already, it seemed such a long time ago. She pulled her phone out of her pocket and stared down at it.

‘It’s too wet to see anything! I’ll have to do it when we get indoors.’

‘Okay.’ He put his arm about her shoulder, despite the rain and the cold, feeling a sense of pride. She was his girl now. ‘Let’s make a run for it.’

The road up to Bony’s would have been impossible to drive through. It had turned into a river bed with water surging down; big lumps of stone and stuff came rushing towards them. It was hard to see more than a few metres ahead as the sky had darkened to slate grey and a mist hung over everything. But they’d gone about half a mile before he realised how dangerous it was. Now the water was up to their knees, waves lapped ever higher. It was weird with the road gone. Nothing was in its usual place, trees and other landmarks he saw regularly were stranded in their new element. He remembered the ancient underwater forest he’d seen on TV, those blackened forms clawing up to the sky; trees that had once grown on dry land, now swallowed by the sea. What if the same happened here - the trees and hillside engulfed; water claiming all? Then Maddie was

knocked off her feet by an enormous branch floating like a life raft towards them. She staggered and nearly fell under the water, but he held on, pulling her upright.

‘Maybe we should go back?’ she said, clinging onto his arm. Jake could feel her shivering, the tug of current pulling at his own legs wrenching him, like the branch, downhill. He looked back the way they had come, but all he could see was water, churning and swirling its way into the valley and the river. The siren sounded frail and pathetic against the force of the flood.

‘We can’t.’ The water at the bottom of the hill looked too deep to walk in now – and it was just minutes since they’d been there. It must be better to go up rather than down to the river that had engulfed the town. It made sense. He gripped Maddie’s hand tightly. ‘Don’t let go.’

‘Why is it so bad, this has never happened before.’ Maddie was crying now. ‘Oh God, what about Mum. Do you think it is okay up the valley?’

‘I don’t know!’ Other sirens were shrieking. Burglar alarms, by the sound of it, police. He held her cold arm, wanting only to protect her, to find somewhere warm and dry. ‘Keep walking.’

‘Walking!’

She was right. The further they got up the hill, the more their progress was half swimming, half wading. The water was freezing. Every item of his clothing was soaked. Maddie was wearing a waterproof jacket, but it had come open and was swirling about her, dragging her back. The valley was filling up like a glass from a tap and there was nothing they could do. He looked up the road, trying to get his bearings. It couldn’t be too much further to Bony’s house. If they made it around the next bend, they should see the small copse of trees that hid his house. Overhead the unmistakeable sound of a helicopter. Maybe if they could find somewhere to stand, they might attract its attention. He cast about in desperation. This was a nightmare.

But things were about to get a whole lot worse. As Bony’s trees came into view, another sound joined the band of water and siren, a kind of hollow, wrenching noise. Grabbing Maddie’s arm and holding her tight, he looked up the hill as something weird happened. One second the water was running toward them as it had been, the next it kind



of parted and two waves rose up either side, ripping towards them. The ground give way beneath his feet and where they had been walking, they were now swimming. To make things worse, a great hunk of stone came spiralling towards him and he had to pull Maddie from its path.

‘Try and get to the trees!’ he yelled but his voice was no match for the roar of water. Maddie had let go of him but seemed to be doing her best to breast -stroke over to the woods. ‘The house is over there. Get off the road!’ Swimming across the downhill tide was not easy, especially with all the debris crashing towards them. He remembered his mum saying, after the flood of 2012, that water always finds the quickest route, that it was no respecter of people or property. Now, all that was familiar had been submerged. He trod water, flailing around for a foothold. At last his feet touched down on rock, something firm. He held onto a jutting branch and managed to pull Maddie in close. Overhead, the chopper was still circling.

‘Wave,’ he shouted, his voice hoarse. ‘They might see us!’ He stood up and managed to get his balance. As the helicopter swung into view beyond the trees, he swung his arms wildly but it motored out of sight again. ‘Let’s try and get up to Grampa’s –’ He pointed beyond the trees, to where he could make out the gable end of the house.

Maddie pushed the hair from her eyes. She had lost her jacket now and was shivering violently. In the weird watery light, her face was tinged with blue, her red hair was dark and soaked. She looked like one of those Pre-Raphaelite paintings they’d studied at school; some medieval princess floating down the river to her death. They would have to get out of the water soon. ‘Jake, up there, it’s okay.’ She pointed up into the wood and he saw what she meant. Sure, the bracken was wet, and rain was pouring down the tree trunks, making them slick and black, but there was no rushing river.

He realised that they were standing on the wall at the edge of the road. He could feel the coping stones underfoot. The solid wall was about a metre high and seemed to be holding up. Looking downhill, though, the road had been ripped up and the water continued in a terrifying surge.

Maddie caught hold of his hand again. He smiled weakly, wanting to be in a warm dry house, preferably in a warm dry bed. With Maddie cuddled up beside him. But there wasn't room for that kind of thought as step by step, they began to walk the wall.

It didn't take long to get to drier land. Under the trees the ground was still wet, but boggy, and they were able to walk rather than swim. And although the rain was still relentless, the trees protected them a little. He grabbed Maddie's hand and they pulled each other uphill until they at last reached Bony's gate. Both panting with the effort, they clung onto the rotten wood. The house looked the same as ever from the roof to the sills of the upstairs windows, but something weird had happened to the bottom half

'Maddie,' he touched her shoulder to make her look. 'Over there, look. It's sinking.' The lower windows were half underground. The house was being sucked into the hillside.

She jerked her thumb back the way they had come. 'When I left home this morning, I wouldn't have thought that could happen but ...'

He thought of one of his mum's favourite films, 'Titanic', the ship going down. It was hard to get his head around what he was seeing. 'So, my grandad's house, that has been here for like over one hundred years, is just kind of disappearing into the ground?'

'Hope your grandad got out.'

She was right. What if the old man had been down in the front room, the room that was now half buried. What if he was, at this moment being slowly sucked into the earth? He swung his legs down from the gate and took a deep breath. No, it was more likely that he was in his studio at the back of the house. He rarely left the place. But had that ancient glass structure been taken by the hillside as well? Grampa might have seriously pissed him off with the painting of Mum, but he didn't want him to die like this. 'We'll have to check.' They'd been still for a couple of minutes, enough for the cold to take hold. All the wading and swimming had meant he hadn't really noticed the temperature, but now he started shivering uncontrollably, teeth chattering. Maddie was the same, he saw. Her face was kind of blue. If they didn't find somewhere warm soon, they'd both get hypothermia or something. 'We'll have to try and find a way in. Follow me – and keep behind.'

They both swung off the gate and walked, Jake first, towards the house. Each step was a nightmare. He could no longer trust the ground; water swirled and sucked. A few steps up the drive, the drive that had been robust enough to take Sam's car yesterday, and his left leg plunged into a bog. 'Maddie!' He swung back, held onto her outstretched arm and twisting, managed to pull out 'We can't get any nearer the house. It's all collapsed.'

'Oh, God.' She was crying again, the tears steaming in the cold air. 'What are we going to do?'

He looked behind them, to where the ground was still firm, and grabbed a tree branch about half a meter long. 'I'll test the ground with this, then try and get around the back. You stay here, Maddie.'

'You're not leaving me on my own?'

'No point both of us risking our lives.'

'No way.' She was firm. 'Mum always says this part of the woods is haunted.'

'For fuck's sake, I think we've got a bit more to worry about than some so-called ghosts. Stay here. If the helicopter goes over again, wave like mad – they might be able to send someone to get us ... And Maddie?'

'Yes?' In the green damp of the garden, her ashen face really did look haunted. He summoned the last of his chutzpah.

'You're something else, you know that, don't you? When this is over, we'll go somewhere good. Out, to a band or a meal or ...'

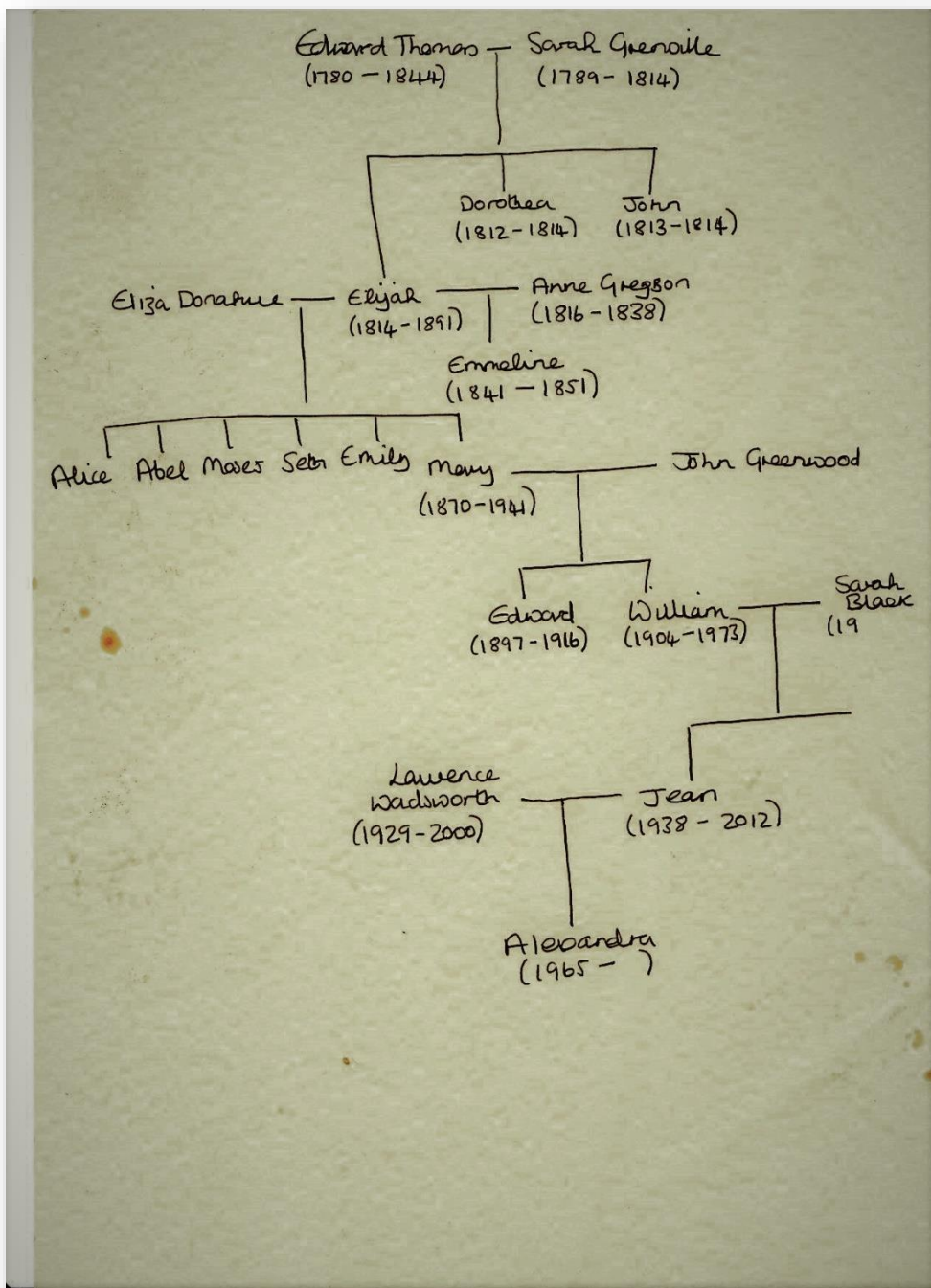
'It's okay.' She gave a brave little smile. 'Just go. I'm okay. I'll wave.'

He dreaded to think what he might find. Grampa had always been fit enough but if the house had sunk like that without any warning, then he might be trapped somewhere. He dared not contemplate the other option.

The garden to the side of the house, where the shed used to be and the little overgrown brick path leading up to it, were gone. Totally gone. The back door was half-swallowed by the hill and there was a wide crack down from the top window to what would have been a step if it hadn't been sucked underground. Jake had a system now. Not to test the ground with his foot, but with the branch that he thrust into the earth ahead of every move.

He needed to find somewhere to get into the house. The doors were all sealed, so the only hope was climbing through one of the upper windows. Progress was slow. The garden was nothing but bog. The wind howled through the naked trees, sounding at times almost human; he put the idea of ghosts out of his mind. It was so cold; bone aching cold. He'd made it around to the back of the building but here it was a lot darker. There were fir trees among the deciduous natives, and some pressed almost to the walls of the house. At least, though, they would offer some climbing support. He tested the ground again. His stick plunged down, flicked up an oblong of pink and orange plastic: A mobile phone with the same cover as his mum's. He leant over and attempted to pick it up, but it sank back down into the mud. Clinging to the wall, he looked upwards. The bathroom window was open a crack and he knew this was his only chance.

Climbing trees was something he had loved as a child, but his mother always discouraged it. Consequently, it had become a covert activity – one he had never really mastered. With the branches wet and spikier than he would have thought possible, he almost gave up but knew how crap he'd feel if he turned back now. He grabbed a branch and pulled up. His hands and feet slipped on the wet bark, a strip of skin was scraped from his left arm as a sharp twig ripped through his clothes. The resulting blood soon thinned to water as the rain lashed on the wound. Near the bathroom window, he lunged forward and grabbed the frame to haul himself near. Then, holding onto a branch, he swung his feet at the catch. Within minutes he was slithering head first into the bath. He was in.



## Chris

Chris was left alone for almost half an hour, listening to the flood siren and the bangs and distant voices of the police station. He sat patiently waiting. He knew that this was it. That shameful struggle on the kitchen floor all those months ago, was about to lead to his conviction for murder. And now Eliza Donahue had slipped from his grasp and into Elijah Thomas's marital bed. There was nothing left. He closed his eyes and gave himself up to fate.

'Christopher, wake up!' DI Stephens was shaking his arm violently. 'We need you to look at this!'

He came to with a jolt, dreams of the woods and the girls, of all the stories, his life's work quickly dispersing.

'Do you know who this is?' She was holding a computer tablet under his nose, showing the image of a man he hadn't seen in years; the young man was dressed like a country squire, but he was still instantly recognisable.

'It's Humphrey Lyde, Dad's agent ... Well, he was anyway. That picture must be old. He'll be seventy odd now.'

'An art agent, then?'

He nodded. 'Yeah. Dad and he were at art school together. Humph is a writer and has been his agent years, you know, he sells his paintings.'

'So – you know him well? When was the last time you saw him?'

Chris yawned. What was this about? 'I don't know – ages ago. Years. He used to visit a lot when I was a little kid. But I can't remember the last time I saw him. A long time ago, I think, when Mum was –'

Stephens let out a small, exasperated puff of breath. 'Your mother disappeared in 1980.'

He nodded. 'He came to our house. He bought me a box of chocolates.' He remembered even now, the taste of Black Magic. He had been sent to his room where he had crammed them into his mouth, three or four at a time, filling himself with sweetness

as his mother and Humph talked and laughed downstairs. He'd once told Cathy about it and she'd thought it was worrying that all he cared about was the chocolate.

'And you've had no contact with him since?'

'Why would I?' Chris shivered. The room seemed to be cooling down fast.

'What about your father; does he keep in touch with him?'

Chris closed his eyes again. Humphrey Lyde was the last person he wanted to be thinking about right now. 'I've no idea. It's a while since Bony had an exhibition; Humphrey is in London, I think, while Bony's here.'

'And did Cathy know him?'

Chris's eyes snapped open now. 'Why would she?'

DI Stephens sat down at last and slowly placed some cards down on the table between them. 'These were found in your mother's clothes, in her house. Alex Wadsworth remembered she had recently been contacted by a new agent. Think, Christopher, anything you can remember about this man could be helpful.' The cards depicted a London bus and were somehow familiar. He shook his head. DI Stephens sighed. 'We've tried to contact your father but there is no reply. There's been trouble with landslip up near the crag, so we think that maybe the signal's been interrupted.'

He tried to picture his father, painting away in his studio, Humph and his mother, but found his mother's face was gone, faded into his nine-year-old memory. Eliza and Thomas took their place, their marriage and all his wasted years. A sudden sob shuddered through him.

'Christopher, is it possible that Humphrey Lyde knew Cathy?'

Once it had been possible that Elijah Thomas murdered twenty-five mill girls but instead, all he'd done was marry one of them. Anything was possible or impossible. He was the last person to ask.

Again, the DI thrust the tablet under his nose and pressed play; some fuzzy images of Rawton Bridge in shuddery black and white. He made out two indistinct figures, walking near the library. 'This is your father a couple of days ago, do you know who the young woman with him might be?'

He recognised his father's familiar slightly stooped walk. The woman he remembered too. He sighed. She was the reason Jake had hit him. Pushing the tablet away, he turned to face the DI. Maybe there was something here after all. 'According to my son, she is my sister. A child of my father's by some student of his. Her name is Sam. Samantha Fountain.'

Chris looked up at the DI trying to process the information and determine its significance.

'We need your father to clarify this.'

'But why has this got anything to do with Cathy?'

'Someone has been sending messages to your son from Cathy's phone. His phone provider fast-tracked the calls and messages. They seem to be coming from London, except for the last day or two when they were local.'

'Is Sam under suspicion then?' He shuffled his feet under the desk. The temperature in the room had dropped. The rain had finally stopped but damp emanated from every wall. A dark stain had appeared on the ceiling above the DI's head.

She sighed impatiently, shaking her gleaming hair. In another life, he might have found her attractive. 'We have to follow every lead, Mr Adams.'

A knock on the door and Sergeant Jones burst in all out of breath; she was dressed in a soaking raincoat. 'Guv, there's a problem. A big one. Seems like the Crag Road has subsided.'

'I see.' The DI was still preoccupied. 'Christopher –'

'The helicopter has been scrambled from the coast. The area around Flaights – the chapel and woods nearby are all sliding down. The hillside is ripping in two.'

The DI stood up and gave an impatient flick of her head. 'We can't get up there?'

'Not without being airborne. The water is tearing everything up. No one who lives up that way is going anywhere, and we'll not reach them.'

'Then send the helicopter out to the house. There must be somewhere to land.'

'That'd be okay, Guv. if the whole valley wasn't flooded. Rawton Bridge and Gibbetroyd are half under water. Priority has got to be rescuing those in the bottom of the valley. Anyone who lives up Cragside will have to take their chances.'



‘Shit!’ For the first time, the DI was flustered. ‘We’ll terminate this interview here, Christopher –’

He gave a tight smile. ‘So, am I still under arrest?’

‘For the time being, yes. Until we speak to your father. Sergeant Jones, can you please take him to the cells?’

Chris was led through the police station, to the stone steps that lead down to the cells. He had visited them once, seen the four lonely rooms built in Elijah Thomas’s time. The building was almost deserted and yet thanks to the flood warning and the scream of a hundred burglar alarms outside, a sense of urgency pervaded everything. It was apparent as soon as they began to descend to the lower floor, however, that he would not be staying there tonight. Water was lapping over the tiled floor below. The lowest steps had disappeared.

‘I’ve not seen that before,’ the Sergeant said, tugging at his arm. ‘We’d best go back and get out of here.’ She turned and calmly lead him to another small room near the entrance where a shaven-headed middle-aged man was manning the phones. He removed his headphone when they entered.

‘Jim, the cells are flooded,’ Sgt Jones said. ‘Nowhere to put the prisoner. Can you put a call through to Blackstone and see if they’ve room?’

He shook his head. ‘No chance. The lines are down and Blackstone’s in the river now. They evacuated twenty minutes ago. Looks like we’ll have to do the same. Just had a call through from a young lass trapped up Crag Road. She reckons there’s people stuck in the house there.’

‘Just take me home, I’m not going anywhere,’ Chris said. Now he knew Eliza Donahue’s fate, he just wanted to lie down and sleep. His search was over.

‘Can’t do that, I’m afraid,’ Jones said. ‘Can you keep an eye on him, Jim, while I go check with my guv? Sit down, please, Mr Adams. I won’t be long.’

She left the room; Jim winked at her retreating backside and replaced his headphones as soon as the door closed behind her. Chris settled back in the office chair. The room was cluttered with furniture, filing cabinets, desks and it smelled ripe, of damp and Jim’s sweat. High up in the corner nearest the door a TV showed the local news: a bird’s eye

view of Blackstone being inundated. Water poured into the valley from the moors above. The scene was one of devastation, though there were a couple of quirky pictures of canoeists taking advantage of the new landscape. The presenter was highly excited at the disaster: ‘The River Scaroyd has burst its banks and hundreds of people have been flooded out of their homes in the Scardale Valley as water continues to deluge local towns. Seven inches of rain – more than a month’s expected rainfall – has poured down over the last twenty-four hours. Local businesses have been destroyed and the army has been called out to rescue residents from their homes ...’ Chris shifted in his chair to get a better view. It looked as though his flat would be impossible to reach. The Blackstone Road was under water. The news presenter was interviewing Andrew Thorpe from the environment agency. Dressed in waders and long mac, he looked ready for an afternoon’s fishing.

‘The rainfall is totally unprecedented,’ he said. ‘Records of floods in Gibbetroyd in recent years – in 1967 and 1982 – have shown the waters reaching a height of three feet. The Rawton Courier of May 1851 reports a devastating flood about which little is known, although it destroyed the quarry on Cragside and a large section of the original schoolhouse at Flaights. In 1967 ...’

Chris stared at the screen. How come he had never known about this flood? How come there was nothing mentioned in any record of Underbank Mill? He waved at Jim who removed his headphones. ‘I need to use the bathroom.’

Jim looked annoyed. ‘You’ll have to wait. There’s no one to take you and I’m the only one manning the phone. There’s people calling from all over.’

‘I can’t.’ He mimed desperation. He had to get out as soon as possible.

Jim sighed. ‘Christ, this is all I need. Okay, I’ll have to bring the phone –’ He stopped, gasping as a rush of ankle deep water pushed the door open. ‘On second thoughts ....’ He waded to where Chris was sitting and pulled at his arm. ‘We need to move and quickly!’ He pulled his rucksack from a cupboard in his desk and stuffed in his tablet and a couple of notebooks.

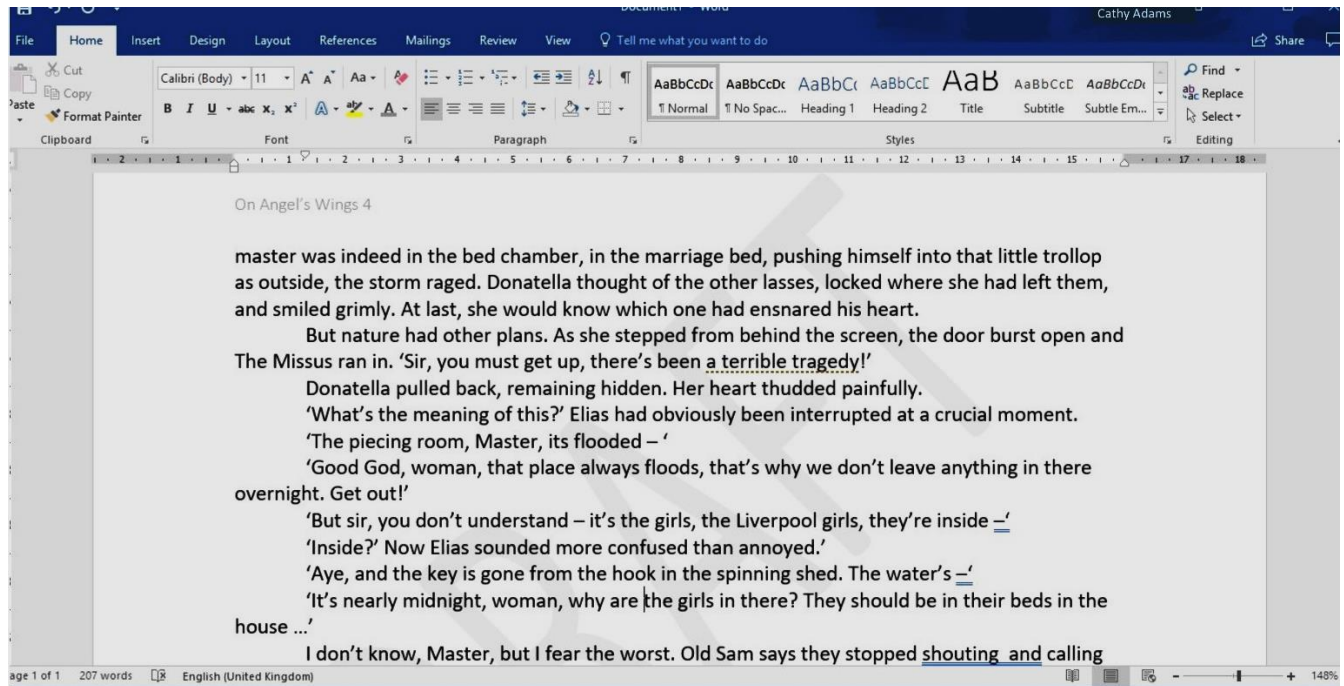
‘Where to?’ Chris asked. ‘If the valley bottom is flooded, then we can’t get to Blackstone, so ...’

The phone rang again. Jim picked it up. 'Yes? Ah, DI Stephens, I am glad it is you. I need to know – Yes, he's here, now. Okay ...' He replaced the handset.

Chris looked up at Jim. 'Can we get out of here now?'

'We've to go up to the top floor and wait till they can get us. There's no other choice. Here,' He pulled a fleecy blanket down from a shelf next to his desk. 'Take this. It's going to be a long cold night.'

## Plate 36



## Jake

‘Grampa, get up! Grampa, you’ve got to move the house is sinking!’

Bony looked up into the flushed face of his only grandson. From this angle and with this expression, he looked so like his mother, that tinge of madder along the side of his cheek, those dark enquiring eyes. As he struggled to focus, he became conscious of the icy water in which he lay. But he was tired, so tired, it was impossible to concentrate, and he drifted off again.

‘It’s flooded. We have to get out! Grampa, please!’

‘Flooded?’ he remembered the paramedic’s reassurances. Then Bony felt himself being lifted, up, up, and now he was on his feet, calf-deep in muddy water, being pulled along, while Jake kicked away floating items, tubes of paint, pieces of paper, his life’s work. Movement was slow through the water and the cold was almost alive. His teeth chattered so much he couldn’t even think the words he wanted to say, never mind articulate them. He was reminded of paintings of the past, those that had sustained him over the years, Delacroix, Caravaggio, El Greco, of young and old locked in human struggle. Shadows played on the surface of the water, colours were muted. Beyond, at the periphery of his vision, blackness.

‘I’m gonna try and smash the window and get straight out into the garden,’ Jake said. Just stand back a little. Honest, Grampa – didn’t you see how bad the rain was? You should have got away hours ago.’

Bony shook his head and clung to a canvas hanging on the wall, an old sketch for one of his nudes. He couldn’t remember the name of this one. He couldn’t remember very much at all. He looked out of the French window, unsure of what to do next. The water outside looked higher than in the studio. Why was this? When had it happened? Jake grabbed hold of his tool-box, the metal one he’d brought up from Camden with Sylvie, the one he’d bought as an undergraduate in London, and hurled it at the window. It shattered immediately, causing a small tidal wave in the studio. If he hadn’t been clinging so tightly to Sandra – ah, he remembered now, a blonde with lilac eyes, the subject in the painting that had never been finished and remained after all these years on a robust

stretcher – he would have been knocked flat. His ribs felt sore and a dull ache throbbed in his solar plexus, making him gasp for air. Jake turned back as though he was about to come and help him through the door, but then dark shadows flickered across his pale skin.

‘G... Grampa, look, we’re not going to get out of here.’

In slow motion, Bony followed the direction of his grandson’s gaze out into the garden where a deluge of steely grey had obliterated the rhododendrons, cloaking them like one of Christo’s wrapped objects, in a shining, moving, living material. Reflections played on Jake’s cheeks, creating a mask of cobalt-streaked ochre. A warmth spread through Bony, a feeling of peace that was better than any joint. A thousand tones of living metallic grey were moving towards him, pierced by sudden bursts of cadmium yellow, alizarin crimson, hunter’s green.

Karma. A vague memory stirred in him, of his time at university back in the sixties. He’d walked into a lecture late. Sylvie was already there, six rows up, her dark head bowed as she diligently took down notes. He’d waved, and she smiled at him, a smile that lit the dimmest corners of the room. Man, but she was a looker. He tried to attract Humph’s attention, but his friend has eyes for one person only. Humph was sitting to Sylvie’s left, three of four seats away left and gazing at her with what could only be adoration. Bony remembered the warning chill that crept over him. There was something so intense in Humph’s expression, so desperate. But he had dismissed it then, as he had dismissed Humph’s haranguing of him on the moor that last day he had seen Ailsa and he had carried on with his life, little knowing the hatred that was building in the man he considered a friend.

‘Grampa, please, wake up. What are we going to do?’ Jake was tugging at his arm.

Bony came to and squinted at his grandson. As he focused his eyes, the reality of their situation made itself clear. They were about to be engulfed. ‘We’re going to get outta here!’ he said with as much vigour as he could muster. The time had come to take charge again. ‘Come, on, kid. You’ve just about saved my life but both of us have to move or we’ll drown in here.’

He glanced back one last time at the studio that had been his home for so many years, with a tug of regret. The flood would erase any trace of his existence in this place; all his

work lost. Everything. But there was no time for grieving now, no time to save anything of his life's toil. He waded towards Jake and together, they stumbled into the garden. Once there, the cold delivered its worst. Darkness was falling over the valley, the thinning winter light leeching all colour from the landscape. This was a scene from Goya or Dali; all was black and umber and dripping. The bowed trees' broken limbs begged the skies for mercy. What chance did they stand against the fury of the crag? She was shrugging them off, like ants. He could see now that although his studio had held out against the collapsing hillside, the rest of the house had not. As they moved away from the door a dull, grating noise filled the air and the main house began to crack away from the glass addition.

'Grampa. Your house!'

Bony looked up. From the east, a sulphurous yellow light proclaimed the last of the day. The garden was a lake. It was impossible to see where it was safe to tread, where they might end up swimming. Bushes he remembered as over six feet high were poking only inches above the water. They were marooned on the little raised path outside the studio.

'We'll have to swim for it, kid.'

'And Maddie – she's here, too. I hope she's okay. Oh, God, I hope she's ...' Jake stopped and stared up, beyond him. Grampa –'

It was too fast. Afterwards, people would describe it in biblical terms, as an unleashing of the Almighty upon the little town, but to Bony, there was something entirely expected about the catastrophe. When the crag ripped in half, cleaving the road into two, it was with a breathless hush; a slow sigh and the land reared up like limbs beneath a blanket. Where they had been treading water or swimming, they were sucked back into the mud. Gravity returned. The water gurgled into a huge fissure that ran from the top of the crag to the centre of the lawn.

'Kid, get here!' Bony grabbed a piece of plywood that had broken away from the pile near the shed. 'It's not much but it is all we have.' He pulled Jake away from the steadily opening crevice towards the rhododendron bushes where they held onto the thick trunks, as hell was released around them. Bony wished he was religious, that he, like the reverend

of Flaights Chapel, had an old-style God to believe in rather than the persistent force of destiny. He could hardly talk for his teeth chattering and the roar of water and wind; all the elements had been whipped up and mixed together. It was crazy, dangerous, terrifying. He felt younger, more alive, than he had for years.

‘Gra ... Are we going to get out of this?’ The kid was crying, totally freaked out.

‘Sure.’ Bony looked up to the sky and saw a slice of starred sky between the steely clouds. A momentary surge of hope was quickly quashed by a sudden jarring of his leg. Something slammed against him, knocking the wind from his lungs.

‘Grampa, what the hell?’ The crack in the garden had become a gulley, six feet or more in width, and it was disgorging its secrets. Even in the poor light, it was clear what these secrets were.

‘Coffins! Jeez ...’ They burst from the earth as though something or someone was hurling them out. They crashed against each other like boats being beached on some grim shore, more and more of them, until, with a final gasp, the last was delivered. The crag’s birth cries ceased, the wind dropped, and all was silent.

‘Is this a graveyard?’ Jake asked, between chattering teeth.

Bony shrugged, all his strength suddenly sapped; he thought of Sylvie’s fears of haunting, of Chrissie riding round and round this very spot on his little trike. ‘Looks like it, kid.’

‘Did you know? Did anyone know?’

Bony let go of the rhododendron which had probably saved his life, reached around to touch Jake’s shoulder. ‘I didn’t know, but I should’ve guessed,’ he said. ‘But it’s over, kid. It’s over and we survived.’



*Finishing Off*

**Denouements**

Cathy Adams

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a mystery thriller in possession of a murder plot must be in want of a killer. What a shock, then, dear reader, when the plot and the murderer never quite get it together to create the satisfying ending we all desire.

Murder requires justice and there are thousands of crime novels dispensing Lustitia's will, liberally dolling out lifetime sentences, random shootings or ensuring that even if the murderers aren't brought to book, they are bound for a lifetime of guilt. But life does not always mirror art. Almost a quarter of murders in the UK of the last twenty years remain unsolved, despite the amazing advances in forensic technology. In the Citizen's Report of 2012, forty-seven per cent of female victims knew their murderer and, of course, the murder victims in my novel, *On Angel's Wings*, knew theirs. As readers we know who is responsible and yet Elias, the main suspect, goes unpunished, allowed to live out his life in comfort and ease. Does this seeming lack of resolution mean that the novel is unfinished or is there an alternative here that will fulfil our hunger for denouement?

Elias as a character has everything. He is rich and privileged, he has standing in his town and a beautiful Italian wife. There is one thing, however, that he does not have and that is a child of his own. Unbeknownst to him, Donatella, his wife aborts every child she conceives. Elias satiates his need for fatherhood by procuring young girls for use in his mill; he even falls in love with one of them, resulting in the accidental death of twenty-four others. After this incident, he changes; he becomes desperate and violent, pimping out his employees to his powerful friends. At the end of the novel he is so far gone that he is unable to see the error of his ways. Guilt is out of reach. His monstrosity goes unrecognised

## Chris

DCI Stephens and DS Jones were waiting in the carpark afterwards. The reverend had only agreed to the funeral taking place at Flaights on the proviso that he conduct the service at the back of the church, with mourners sitting to the right of the aisle. After the flood a sink hole had appeared in the floor to the left, and part of the organ collapsed. People joked that God had preserved the church for the faithful. Chris suspected that Reverend Arkwright's will alone had kept the place standing.

Despite efforts to keep it quiet, quite a few people had turned up, friends of Cathy's and a few die-hard fans who'd driven through Rawton, enduring the traffic jams on Blackstone Road caused by the roadworks underpinning the water-ravaged tarmac. If they'd come for a show, they were disappointed. The reverend gave an off the peg funeral address, with a trite homily and taped hymns. The mourners were filtering out of the church door, shaking his hand and blinking in the sunshine.

'A good send off,' the detective said, greeting Chris with a nod. 'I am sure your ex-wife would have appreciated it.'

He was anxious to be away to the crematorium. 'Thanks for coming.'

'Just paying our respects, Mr Adams. You can come and collect your belongings any time. And Ms Wadsworth said you can keep the photographs, the family tree and so on. She said that Cathy always intended for you to have them.'

Hours later, after a finger buffet in the White Swan and several pints of Black Sheep Ale, after listening to Cathy's university friends' Prosecco-oiled eulogies, after enduring drunken tears and paying the bill with money borrowed from Bony, Chris drove to the police station, half-cut, gobbling a packet of Polos on the way. Back at his desk, he opened the envelope and smoothed out a sepia photograph of several young women in white. Cathy had imagined the drowning of the twenty-four girls in the first draft of *On Angel's Wings* and Chris could think of no better solution, though he had encouraged her to delete this original plot. Forensic tests conducted over six months on a couple of the Coldwater House coffins were inconclusive. They had been underground for far too long

and there was nothing much left to examine other than fragments of contaminated DNA. The coffins were roughly made, but of the right age and although tests indicated that the remains were female, the rest was all conjecture. There had been a great overnight flood at around the time the girls disappeared and, if they did indeed perish in the old apprentice house or in the mill itself, then their employer was responsible for concealing this fact. But men like Elijah Thomas were rich and powerful enough to side-step the law by giving the young women a decent burial while buying the silence of any witnesses. It took a catastrophic flood over one hundred and sixty years later to expose his negligence.

Chris had become Elijah Thomas's chronicler. He opened his laptop. His book, finally, was ready to be sent to his publisher, who was very enthusiastic about it. 'Creative non-fiction', he said, 'is where the money is at the moment.' *Finding the Twenty-Five* described the fate of Elijah Thomas's apprentices from the day of their indenture to the moment the coffins were spewed out of the hillside. It also described Chris's journey through his obsession.

'Chrissie, you in there?' Bony shuffled through from the lounge. Since the flood, he had become increasingly frail. Maybe it was the loss of his home of forty years, of his lifetime's work; maybe it was just old age. Only one painting had been saved, a recent effort that was all thick streaks of black and red. It looked like a child's untutored daubs.

'What do you want?' Chris snapped. How many times did he have to tell his father to leave him alone when he was working?

'A letter. From Sam.'

Chris stared at the screen. He didn't want to hear this. He didn't want to think about it. Living back in the house he had shared with Cathy was bad enough. Living there with his father and his son felt wrong. And now this interloper, Sam. He couldn't wait for the builders to finish repairing his own flooded apartment.

'She wants to come and see us again. Get to know us. I'm gonna write back, say it's okay.'

Chris felt his blood pressure rising. Why come in here telling him this? He had too much to do. 'Do what you like, Bony, but don't expect me to get involved –'

'Son, look at me.'

‘What?’ Chris craned his neck to look up into Bony’s haggard old face.

‘Out there –’ Bony clung to the back of Chris’s chair and pointed out of the window to where the moor met the blue sky. ‘The hills and the rocks and the whole crazy landscape. It’s been there for millennia –’

‘So?’

‘But we’re here now, man. This is all we have, a blink of an eye in the timescale of this place. We are all we have. Each other.’

Chris tutted. He’d promised the article to the Rawton Bridge Courier this week and there were a couple of facts he needed to check: the day Elijah Thomas first went to Liverpool to arrange for the batch of apprentices and a copy of the banns put up for Eliza Donohue’s marriage to John Brierly, the marriage that never happened. He might just have enough time to visit the museum at Blackstone. He wrote a couple of sentences, then turned to Bony, but the old man was shuffling out of the room.

# The Telegraph

## Obituaries

Humphrey Lyde, Art Critic and Agent



This week we lost an unsung hero of the modern art scene. Art Critic and agent, Humphrey Lyde (79), died peacefully at home in West London after a short illness, leaving daughter, Samantha, at the helm of his empire. Lyde, responsible for making the names of some of the best-known British artists of the last fifty years, was not always the easiest man to know. Ebullient at the best of times, downright vicious at the worst, he was possessed of a discerning eye and a cruel wit. He could make or break you at the drop of a hat.

I first met Lyde back in 1970 when he was iconic sixties artist, Bony Adams's, agent. We bumped into each other in the French pub in Soho where Lyde was plying a young lady with gin. The lady in question, somewhat worse for wear, passed out in the toilets and had to be syphoned into a taxi home. Lyde's attitude was 'you win some, you lose some'.

Lyde's final years were troubled. Within weeks of losing his wife, he was accused of the murder of Yorkshire novelist, Cathy Adams. He was out on bail, still awaiting trial, at the time of his death. Many, including his own daughter and his one time friend and client, Bony Adams, believe in his guilt. The discovery of Adams's missing mobile phone among Lyde's possessions indicate that he was responsible for the strange messages her son was still receiving after his mother's death.

But Lyde's unerring instinct for spotting an artist on the brink of success was legendary. The Brit Art phenomenon could be largely attributed to him: Allie Wade, David Cooper-Smith, Kali O'Shea and Damien Strong all first came to public recognition through Lyde. His seminal work, *Flare*, of two decades earlier, is still in print today and represents some of the most cutting-edge thinking on gender and culture in the late sixties. Here, we see for the first time, Adams's 'nudes in interiors' and Paul Nelson's 'women in chains', works that tread the fine line between exploitation and radical thinking—as did Lyde himself.

It is a personal memory, though, that for me, sums up the man. At the annual Goldsmiths' exhibition of 1978, I stood and watched as he swept the room with his eyes, always looking for that work, that artist who would break the mould and earn him a tidy penny into the bargain. His gaze alighted on a small ceramic piece by the then twenty-four year old, Paula Indigo and his expression changed from one of curiosity to covetousness, of hunger. Here I recognised the essence of the man. He would have what he wanted at any price and this is what set him apart from others in his profession. This was not just business to him, the rudimentary act of buying and selling, this was about possessing beauty. Paula later told me that he screamed in rage when she told him that she was already represented. But this quality gave him the edge over other agents and critics. To possess an object of beauty requires an understanding of its many qualities. Therein lies the key to his success. The art world will certainly be poorer for his loss.

Emile Banbury-Bell

## Jake

‘So?’ Maddie was at Rawton Station already, her chestnut hair gleaming in the August sunshine.

‘So what?’ Jake kissed her cheek, torn between excitement and dread.

‘What did you get? Will you be going to –’

‘You first.’

‘Okay!’ She pulled a sheet of paper from her pocket. ‘Three A’s and a B. Nottingham here I come!’

‘Fantastic! I told you! My girlfriend the famous biologist! Doctor Maddie, you’ll be. How cool is that?’ He hugged her, picking her up and swinging her round.

She laughed. ‘Slow down! I need my feet on the ground. I’ve got about seven years studying before I get to that level! Anyway, how about you?’

‘Canterbury – An A and two B’s.’

‘Well done! I am glad you decided to do Graphic Design. I never knew how good you were at drawing till I saw the painting of the flowers on that cupboard you made.’

He shrugged. ‘I guess it’s in the genes.’

‘I guess it is, Mr Artist!’ Maddy linked her arm through his. ‘You got the tickets?’

‘Yup, a duo to Leeds. And this.’ He opened the carrier bag he was holding to reveal a cardboard box about the size of a brick. ‘I had to distract Dad with a question about those mill girls, and while he was rummaging for some old document I managed to shove it under my tee shirt.’

Maddy shuddered. ‘That’s just weird. Having to nick your own mum’s ashes.’ She had to shout over the noise of the tannoy announcing the eleven- thirty to York.

‘Even weirder having to sneak off to scatter them. Dad would have kept them forever, another thing to add to his collection of old stuff.’

‘So where are we going?’ The train was slowly pulling into the platform and they waited for the doors to open.

‘Roundhay Park. Grampa always says she loved it there. Thanks for doing this, Maddie.’

‘I love you,’ she said simply.

‘What?’

She skipped lightly onto the train. ‘You heard!’

Later, they walked up to Crimsworth Moor, sat on the pile of stones, all that was left of an old cottage. They shared a bottle of cider and Jake felt on the good side of pissed. A gentle wind ruffled his hair and the drone of bees was beginning to lull him to sleep.

‘Won’t you miss it, being here?’ Maddie asked, nudging him awake. As always in summer when the weather was good, the sun beating down on the heather, Rawton Bridge could feel like a slice of paradise.

‘Nope. Only you. And I will miss you, no matter what you say about weekends and holidays –’

‘It’ll be all right, I promise. We’ll work it out.’ She took his hand and gave it a squeeze.

‘– and Grampa. I’m just glad Grampa came to live up in the house with me. Otherwise I would’ve been stuck with Dad.’

‘You still not getting on?’

Jake shook his head slowly, shading his eyes from the intensity of the sunset to look up at Maddie. ‘It’s not that. It’s just like Grampa says. Dad’s incapable of a normal relationship. Something bust in him years ago. It’s just what he’s like. His research will always mean more to him than us. Anyway, he’ll go back home, once his flat’s ready.’

‘And the inquest ...?’

‘Next week, but it’s not going to tell us much. We know Mum was stabbed and we’ve an idea who did it. Just a shame we’ll never really know...’

‘What about the police?’

‘DCI Rachel – you know the one you said looks like she should be on TV? Well, she said the case remains unsolved. Lyde is in the frame, of course, but it could just have easily been a stranger passing through. Okay, Lyde had Mum’s phone but he insisted that he knew nothing about it. He said he must have picked it up somewhere instead of his own and he’s not here to defend or incriminate himself ...’

Maddie leaned against Jake, nestled her cheek into his shoulder. ‘At least your Mum is at peace now. That poem you read today was lovely.’

‘It was song lyrics: Dido’s Lament. Mum always played it. Yes, it feels good to have scattered her somewhere she felt at home. I feel like I’m ready now, *really* ready to move away.’ Jake sighed and looked down the valley, seeking out the familiar coffin-shaped cleft between the hills, his town nestled within its bounds. But something had changed. He jumped to his feet and stared. Something was very different. ‘Maddie,’ he said, conscious of the lump of emotion in his throat. Maddie look!’

She rose and joined him, threading her arm through his. He kissed the top of her head, breathed in her special smell. ‘We’ve been set free!’

The new gulley cleaving the crag in two, the gulley that had opened on the night of the great flood, had transformed the town, leaving Rawton Bridge at the heart of a cross, with arms extending north and south as well as west and east. The coffin had been broken. Only the lid of sky remained and for today at least, it was a clear and unbroken blue.

**The End**



**Plate 39**



*Two Victorian women, one seated, in sepia colour [photo] private collection, Halifax*